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**RELIGION**

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# RELIGION

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## INTRODUCTION

‘RELIGION’, writes Dr. Gilbert Murray, ‘like poetry and most other living things, cannot be defined.’ Hence there is no universally accepted definition of religion from which this essay can safely start. It may, however, be generally granted that man has a sense of the sacred, and that religion falls under the category of the sacred. In philosophical terms the sacred may be defined as that which is deemed to have an infinite worth, to involve an unconditional obligation. The savage may treat as of infinite worth his fetish-object, which in fact is a mere bundle of sticks of oddments; he may give his life rather than break a ritual law which in itself has no rational significance; here, to use a psychological term, he projects ‘his sense of the sacred upon that which is intrinsically worthless; but his prostration before his crude idol no less than Plato’s reverence for the Idea of the Good is an illustration of man’s innate sense of the sacred. Man’s spiritual advance may be measured by the degree to which he ascribes worth-ship, that is worship, to that which is really of infinite worth or which really involves an absolute obligation. This sense of the sacred must be deemed an *a priori* category, for it cannot be derived from any other sentiment or principle.

The sacred is a wider concept than religion. The disinterested pursuit of truth, ethics, art, and re-

ligion alike have their root in this sense of the sacred. The atheist Marxist who gives his life for the altruistic ideal of a classless society, the agnostic scientist who will endure persecution or martyrdom rather than tamper with the truth, the penniless artist who will starve rather than be disloyal to the service of Beauty, may not in any conscious sense be religious men, but they all exemplify that human sense of the sacred which is also the mark of religion. At the most primitive levels of human life religion, art and ethics cannot be distinguished, and science has hardly appeared at all. While, however, religion can never be wholly distinguished from ethics, aesthetics, politics and the pursuit of truth in general, the distinction between these spheres or aspects of life tends to become clearer with the advance of culture.

Religion belongs to the rational aspect of man's nature because it offers, or attempts, an answer to the insistent questions posed to every human being, savage or civilized, by human life itself. First, man as such is aware, however dimly, that he is not self-explanatory or self-sufficient; he has a sense of 'creatureliness' or dependence, of the mystery of the Whole, of his own insignificance. The prayer of the Breton fisherman, 'Help me, O God; my boat is so small, and thy ocean so wide', answers to the prayer of many a 'savage'. Second, man is feelingly aware of the life of sense and of Nature round about him with its immensities and terrible powers, its cyclic order and its sudden overwhelming disasters. Third, he knows that death awaits him sooner or later. Corresponding to these three

human awarenesses we constantly find in man first, some sense of 'God', however vague; secondly, Nature-cults such as the rites of springtime and harvest, of puberty and marriage; finally, the cult of the departed. These may be regarded as man's dim and often unrelated answers to the questions inevitably set to him by human life. It is by no accident, therefore, that religions often tend to the emergence of more or less well-defined 'trinities' such as Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva, Zeus-Apollo-Dionysus, Tiu-Thor-Wodan, and perhaps, in popular as distinct from official Christianity, the Father, the Mother and the Crucified. Any religion claiming finality must give some satisfying and harmonious answer to the questions raised for man by his feeling of dependence, by the life of sense and by the inevitability of death.

But, though religion has its rational aspect, it is not solely or even primarily a matter of the intellect. It is response to environment before it is intellectual theory. The history of religion is not the story of 'curiously confused speculation', but rather, as John Oman put it, the story of man's long endeavour to know a higher environment than the world of the senses by learning to live rightly in it.

The scientific or comparative study of religions is made the more formidable by the recent accumulation of an immense mass of information regarding the religious ideas, rites and habits prevalent to-day and in the past. Such collections as may be found, for instance, in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* or the volumes of Frazer's *Golden*

*Bough* suggest that most of what we call religion is a confused jumble of ideas and practices, almost infinitely various, almost equally irrational, and often repellent or obscene. Most of the observable religion of 'savages' is, indeed, the pitiful and arbitrary crossed occasionally by the sublime; even the developed religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, empirically regarded, offer in each case a congeries of diverse and often contradictory beliefs and practices. But the confusion is far less than at first sight appears. There are certain well-defined and constantly recurring 'moments' in religion, and the basic pattern of all religions is relatively simple. Indeed, since human nature is everywhere fundamentally the same, it is likely that, if we fully understood ourselves, we should be in a position to understand all religions.

Thus, many a schoolboy says to himself: 'If I reach that lampost before the 'bus, I shall pass my exam.'; many a soldier wears a talisman or amulet or carries a lucky sixpence in which he, rather shamefacedly, places a certain amount of confidence. The cult of astrology is, even in this 'scientific' age, widely prevalent; indeed, Estlin Carpenter asserts that in 1889 the Astronomer-Royal had to issue a formal certificate denying the rumour that, on the night when Robert Browning died, a new star had appeared in the constellation of Orion. Till the late sixteenth century it was customary each 29th of June to lead a garlanded buck to the high altar of St. Paul's with the sound of trumpets. There the buck was received and

blessed, later to be killed and roasted for a feast. Dr. Bouquet declares that in a Devon village, as late as the year 1853, 'it was still the custom for the lads of the village to go to a menhir in one of the neighbouring fields and to sacrifice a ram by cutting its throat and then burning it, after which there was a feast upon the roast carcass'. A sense for sacrifice and offering still remains with us; those who are far from the confident Christian hope often bring costly flowers year after year to lay upon the graves of those they love, and Estlin Carpenter further records that 'a little child, seeing a steam-tram advance with irresistible might along the road, offered it her bun'. Primitive rites and ideas linger in the traditions, customs, superstitions of the countryside; once vivid and full of meaning they have become pale and dim for us; yet, if we can understand to what in us they make their appeal, we are in a position to understand innumerable parallel rites and ceremonies, immeasurably various in form but nearly identical in substance, in the history of religion.

So much for the psychological aspect of religions. Their truth or falsehood we shall variously appraise in accordance with our ultimate personal response to our sensible and super-sensible environment.

Two warnings will be in place by way of further introduction. First, while it is possible within limits to write the history of religions whose beginning is known, the history of religion as a whole cannot be told. The phrase 'primitive religion' is in common use, and I have retained it here in the sense of 'elementary', but strictly there are no new or

primitive peoples upon earth. We cannot safely assume that the religious rites or ideas which we regard as most 'savage' are necessarily earlier than nobler ideas and practices. 'The study of prehistoric psychology', as the late Dean Rashdall used to say, 'is a highly speculative subject.' The story of human religion is not a record of a steady ascent from the sordid or 'primitive' to the noble and sublime. Indeed, religion seems to carry within it well-marked inherent tendencies to decay, as, for instance, from vision to scholasticism, from the spiritual to the external, from reverence and wonder to magic; and in the religion of 'savages' there are often traits which seem to point to higher and worthier conceptions from which current practices and superstitions are a declension or a collapse.

Second, in the study of religion the avoidance of labels is of great importance. We are too apt to parcel men out among the religions of the world declaring that savages believe this, Hindus that, and Buddhists something else. That may be true on paper, but it is not true of men. If a man tells us that he is a Buddhist or a Confucianist or a Christian, we are not much wiser as to what he truly and effectively believes about God or man or the world around him. Empirically regarded, Christianity is, no doubt, one religion among many, and it must be treated as such when its professed doctrines are compared with other faiths. Religion itself, however, is, like art or ethics, one human interest manifested in an almost infinite variety of forms. The true significance of religion, as of art and ethics, is to be sought not in its crudest first

beginnings but as in more developed forms it reveals its latent potentialities. If Christianity be the true religion, then in principle it is not one religion among many but religion itself. The purpose of this essay, however, is not to promote Christian claims but to offer the pattern or ground-plan of religion as it has appeared among men and to show its main developments.

## CHAPTER I.

### FUNDAMENTAL MOMENTS IN RELIGION

RELIGION, be it repeated, is response, not theory, but it must be set forth in conceptual terms for the purposes of description.

#### THE MATERIAL SACRED

The English missionary Codrington, in his book *Melanesian Anthropology and Folklore*, published in 1891, explained that the religion of the Melanesians seemed to consist in the conviction of a supernormal, invisible power and in the exercise of means for its control. This power, which they called *mana*, perfectly distinct from normal physical forces, worked both for good and evil. Anything that exceeded the usual strength of men or the usual course of nature was deemed the effect of *mana*. This power may be possessed by a thing, a person, an incantation or a rite. A similar idea with a corresponding word may be found in almost every part of the world; *mana* therefore has become a technical term to describe a supernormal, diffused, impersonal force; it has no necessary connexion with the idea of 'spirits' or of God. A cannibal warrior eats his neighbour that he may acquire his *mana*; amulets, charms, holy relics have *mana*; not least important, *mana* inheres in rites and incantations; thus, 'charm' is by no accident from the same root as the Latin *carmen*, a song. This

impersonal force may be conceived as inhering only in particular and unusual objects, or as a property of all things in greater or less degree. It is the mysterious power of a thing, a person or a ceremony.

It is also a dangerous power. In its negative aspect it is the power of the *tabu* object. 'The word "tabu" is properly an adjective and appears to mean literally "marked off" (perhaps from the Polynesian *ta*, "mark", *pu*, "exceedingly"). Applying equally to persons and things, it signifies that casual contact with them is forbidden as being fraught with mysterious danger.'<sup>1</sup> Thus it has come to be used generally for any prohibition resting on a magical or religious sanction. A *tabu* object is that which is dangerous because of the *mana* that is in it. Thus Uzzah falls dead when he touches the sacred ark (2 Samuel vi. 7). In a book published in 1844 called *The People of the South Seas and Christianity*, a missionary, Meinicke, pointed out that to the islanders all reality is divided into two classes of object, *moa* and *noa*; all that is *moa* is withdrawn from ordinary use; all that is *noa* can be safely used and freely. The root idea of *tabu* seems to be separation. We may compare the Latin word *sanctus* (English, 'saint') from the verb *sancire*, to separate by dedication, or the Greek word *temenos* (from *temno*, to cut) used of the 'close' round a temple. The same conception is found in the 'divinity' that hedges a king, in the idea of sacrilege or of the 'inviolability' of sacred persons or sacred places.

These ideas of *mana* and *tabu* are not difficult to

understand. Man tends to regard with awe any strange or outlandish object, such as a meteorite fallen from heaven, a tree riven by lightning, a rock that looks like a lion, or a place or rite in connexion with which he has had some memorable experience. Thus Jacob having fallen asleep with his head upon a stone, and having dreamed a remarkable dream, says with awe, 'How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God!' (Genesis xxviii. 17).

When a modern motorist will not venture on a journey without his mascot, or a guest will not sit down thirteen at the table, or a golfer cannot bring himself to drive without the due ritual of preliminary waggles, or a bowler at cricket acts as if his success depends upon the peculiar jumps and hops he affects in his run to the wicket, we find illustrations, in a mild form, of ideas of *mana* and *tabu*, but we are apt to speak of 'superstition' rather than 'religion'. It is difficult to suppose that parallel fears and fancies among savage peoples, though far more vivid, have any closer connexion with religion. But that modern men have not altogether transcended the conception of the material or impersonal sacred, and that this idea may still be associated with religion, is shown in our recognition of gravestones as 'sacred' to the memory of the departed, in the common opinion that Christian baptism is not valid apart from the use of a particular formula, and in the elaborate ceremonies of cleansing and of approach in connexion with sacramental rites.

While a tribe is still at the stage of the material

or impersonal sacred, science is impossible, for experiment could not be apart from sacrilege; moreover, there is the ever-present and rarely avoided lure of magic, which is the manipulation of mysterious powers, without reverence, for personal ends. Yet these crude ideas have been the seed-bed of much that is noble. Thus *tabus* connected with marriage have helped to hold society together by restraining the natural tendency to sexual promiscuity; the sense that a notable tree or mountain-crest is timber or rock indeed, yet something more, its beauty being an additional element in that which from other aspects science must investigate, lies at the root of aesthetics, for he is not the wisest of men to whom a primrose by the river's brim is but a yellow object to be studied under a microscope; nor, finally, may we easily dismiss as 'primitive' the belief that the spiritual can be conveyed through the material.

#### ANIMISM

*Mana* is an impersonal force; a god is personal. Between the two there are imperceptible grades. *Mana* may come to be regarded as a diffused principle of life; this life-force is often apprehended as gathered into particular *foci*, and is thus quasi-personally conceived. 'The fetish differs from the amulet', writes Count d'Alviella, 'in that the latter owes its efficacy to a property transmitted from without, whereas the fetish itself always owes its virtue to the presence of a spirit lodged within.'<sup>2</sup> The essence of Animism is the belief in the existence of individual agents. The term 'Animatism' is

better applied to the idea of a diffused life-force, which is scarcely distinguishable from *mana*. Animism is at least on the borderline of the personal. Trees, stones, springs are constantly regarded as being indwelt by spirits or as possessing 'souls'. The term Animism is from the Latin *anima*, a soul. Yet 'soul' may be a very misleading word. We cannot describe these early forms of religious consciousness without importing philosophical terms which are far from the conscious mind of barbarous peoples. A child will address a table or a chair as if it were a person, but the child has no conscious idea of a 'soul', and even where savage peoples have a word which we may translate 'soul', this may often not be interpreted in more than a quasi-personal sense. When, for instance, as often happens, it is represented to us that in one body there are several souls, we clearly are not to think of soul in the modern sense of the unifying principle of the personality; these 'souls' are, rather, properties, activities or powers of particular organs, localized functions, as when we ourselves say, 'my head told me to do this, but my heart denied my head'. Here the idea of individuality, and yet more of personality, is scarcely discernible.

Animism is the name given to the worship of 'spirits'; this is a vague term corresponding to 'soul', but is more or less distinguishable from Animatism on the one side and the idea of 'gods' on the other. Animatism implies a diffused life-force; Animism implies that this life-force is focused in certain individuals who are centres of *will*. The distinction between a 'spirit' and a 'god' is hard

to define. The divine or quasi-divine beings corresponding to Animism are dryads, water-sprites, ghosts, werewolves, fiends. A spirit is often a being connected with a particular locality and endowed with a power that is used capriciously; it is necessary therefore to beware of the place where the spirit dwells and to propitiate him if possible. But with a god man enters into some kind of fellowship; there is a relationship between the god and his worshippers, a reciprocity of duties, a certain community of interest. A god is a being with definite characteristics and requirements of his own. But the distinction is fluctuating.

Animism is a nearly universal form of religion amongst peoples of undeveloped civilization. A typical illustration may be taken from the Mundas of Chota Nagpur. Every Munda village, Frazer reports,

' has in its vicinity a grove reputed to be a remnant of the primeval forest left intact for the local gods when the clearing was originally made. Here Desauli, the tutelary deity of the village, and his wife, Jhár-Era or Mabúrú, are supposed to sojourn when attending to the wants of their votaries. There is a Desauli for every village, and his authority does not extend beyond the boundary of the village to which his grove belongs; if a man of that village cultivates land in another village, he must pay his devotions to the Desauli of both. The grove deities are held responsible for the crops, and are especially honoured at all the great agricultural festivals. They are also appealed to in sickness.'<sup>3</sup>

For Desauli read Baal, and we have an excellent picture of that worship so often denounced by the

Hebrew prophets; the *baalim* are the ' lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink ' (Hosea ii. 5).

This is a relatively high form of Animism, for here the spirits are not easily distinguishable from gods. At a lower stage, the savage is apt to suppose that every untoward event, a thunderstorm, an eclipse, a plague of locusts, a disease, is the work of disembodied spirits, and, indeed, this dread of the evil spirits darkens life and is the main spiritual preoccupation of a very large part of the world's population even to-day.

Much of the religion of uncivilized peoples, then, consists in the attempted propitiation or exorcism of evil spirits. This form of Animism is often called Shamanism, because it finds its classical expression among the Ural-Altaic peoples from the Bering Strait to the borders of Scandinavia, where the minister of the religion is the *shaman*. This person tends to be ' nervous, moody, irritable, dreamy, given to hallucinations and trances, or he is epileptic. . . . Among the Yakuts he gabbles like a maniac, takes to the woods, jumps into fire or water, injures himself with weapons. . . . His functions are based on his abnormal qualities and aggravate these in turn ' ;<sup>4</sup> he has the reputed gift not merely of being in touch with spirits but of being possessed by a spirit. He is essentially a medium through whom man and the spirits are brought into touch; his work is accomplished either in the mediumistic trance or at least in a condition of ecstasy where volition is reduced to a minimum. In his trance the shaman is both exorcist and clairvoyant. The

*kamlanie* or shamanistic *séance* has been thus described by the same writer:

' in this the shaman, his assistants, and the spectators are collected in a darkened hut. The dress necessary to the occasion is donned. The shaman beats his tambourine, summoning the spirits, and collects them in it. He sings, dances, cries out, converses with the spirits, and by these means proves his inspired state. He rushes round till he falls fainting and produces delirium. While he is in this state, the spirits reveal their will to him or give him the desired information. He foretells the future and declares the will of the gods. When he awakens, he remembers nothing of what has passed. During the performance voices and noises of various kinds are heard, and these are believed to be produced by the spirits. Or, again, the shaman will allege that he is rising through the heavens, pushing aside the stars, and he describes his experiences. Rhythmic songs, prayers and adorations are used by the shaman in the *kamlanie*'.<sup>5</sup>

Demon-possession, corporate ecstasy, as in the dervish dances, as well as endless and pathetic rites to expel or ward off the influence of demons, come under the heading of Animism, which may seem to be a fruitful source of human misery and degradation and to be without significance for those brought up with a modern scientific education. But the marvels of the mediumistic *séance* are regarded as a proper subject for scientific investigation, and we cannot draw a line of clear distinction between the frenzy of the inspired prophetess at Delphi and the still finer frenzy in which the poet's eye is said to roll. It was customary for many centuries for poets to invoke the inspiration of Apollo or the Muses; this convention represents a once living faith; the poet is possessed by the god or by the

Muse, and the word 'enthusiasm' in its Greek original means properly divine possession. Both poetry and not less obviously prophecy have their humble roots in Animism, nor should we disparage the butterfly because it emerges from the grub. Moreover the higher aspect of Animism which peoples rivers, groves and fields with presiding spirits corresponds with a sense that is rarely absent from the poet:

Enough

Herc to record that I was mounting now  
 To such community with highest truth—  
 A track pursuing, not untrod before,  
 From strict analogies by thought supplied  
 Or consciousnesses not to be subdued.  
 To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,  
 Even the loose stones that cover the highway  
 I gave a moral life: I saw them feel  
 Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass  
 Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all  
 That I beheld respired with inward meaning.

Animism may be often a projection of primitive terror, but at other times and in potentiality an intimation of a spiritual truth.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Not altogether distinguishable from Animism on the one side and from nature-cults on the other are the ideas and rites connected with the dead. The belief that 'the soul' or some part of the person survives death is not absolutely universal. There have been modern philosophers who have doubted it; in Polynesia, too, it seems to have been thought that only the great may expect sur-

vival. But in one form or another the belief in man's survival of death is one of the most widespread of human beliefs, and in some cases, as, for instance, among the central and south-eastern Bantu peoples, it has been altogether the dominant element in religion.

There is a pre-animistic form of the cult of ancestors where the object of worship or piety is not the 'souls' of the ancestors, but the life-substance of the family constantly recurring; moreover, the life-substance of the family is not to be clearly distinguished from the life of the ancestral herds and crops; fertility in man, his beasts and his fields is all the manifestation of one life-force or substance which must be cherished. It is not surprising therefore that there has been controversy amongst classical scholars as to whether the *lares* of the Romans were originally the spirits of the fields or the spirits of the ancestors.

When the idea of some individual surviving soul has arisen, it is natural that relatives and friends should piously make provision, so far as possible, for the needs of the departed in his future life. Thus in the tomb of a Babylonian girl have been found 'an abundance of spare ornaments, flowers, scent-bottles, combs, cosmetic pencils and cakes of the black paste with which they were accustomed to paint the eye-brows and edges of the eye-lids'; in other graves, presumably those of children, toys have been unearthed. If a great chief would hereafter be in need of servants or wives or animals, these were often slain at his grave. This presumably accounts for the Hindu habit of *suttee*. Of this pro-

vision for the departed the Egyptian tombs offer the most ample evidence.

But the dead are very often regarded not with affectionate reverence but with dread as ghosts who must, if possible, be 'laid'. Thus, for instance, in the old Roman rite of the exorcism of the *lemures* or *larvae*, the spirits of ancestors regarded as malignant and dangerous ghosts,

'the head of the house', writes Dr. Cyril Bailey, 'rises from bed at midnight, washes and walks barefoot through the house, making signs for the aversion of evil spirits. In his mouth he carries black beans—always a chthonic symbol—which he spits out nine times without looking round, saying, as he does so, "With these I redeem me and mine"; he washes again, and clanks brass vessels together; nine times he repeats the formula, "Depart, *Manes* of our fathers".'<sup>6</sup>

In the old church at Clevedon, in Somerset, is the grave of Henry Hallam, laid there to rest *usque ad tubam*—till the trumpet sound. This idea is congruous with the name 'cemetery', which means 'sleeping-place'. But the Christians who laid him there believed also that at death the soul departs 'to be with the Lord'. If an inconsistency or confusion of thought so startling as this is possible and common amongst Christians to-day, we may not be surprised that funeral rites among 'the heathen' often show similar confusion. Thus the same Romans who exorcised the *lemures* were accustomed at another season of the year to celebrate the *caristia* or *cara cognitio*, a family reunion of the survivors in a love-feast which centred in the worship of the *lar familiaris*, the spirit of the family,

a solemn and glad acknowledgement of the still subsisting relation of the living and the dead.

Although some sense of communion with the dead is probably almost world-wide, it is in China that it has attained its most systematized and civilized form. Here the cult of the ancestors has been largely an ennobling influence, the bond of society, the ground of social stability.

‘The son exists for the sake of his father and his ancestors, the clan for its founder. Everything that the son possesses belongs to the father, for from him he has received everything, soul, body and patrimony; all his activities, all his communal, vocational, ethical and religious duties are determined by his relation to his living or dead father. “Everything comes from Heaven, only man comes from his ancestors.” So also not the smallest part of the family property may be alienated, for it properly belongs to the ancestors. . . . Every father after death is the recipient of offerings and prayers. . . . Hence to have no son is the greatest crime to one’s ancestors, no son to carry on the ancestral cult.’<sup>7</sup>

In other parts of the world, however, the cult of the ancestors tends to be rather of fear than love.

There would seem also to be a post-animistic stage in the cult of the dead. A number of deities were once human beings; they have been elevated to the pantheon. First, then, they were mortals, then saints or powerful spirits, and finally gods. Instances of this are Herakles among the Greeks and Krishna among the Indians. Not infrequently the heroic or distinguished in life become gods at death; they join the *di manes*, to use the Roman term; they become *elohim*, if we may so interpret the remark of the witch of Endor when she sum-

moned up the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel xxviii. 13). But it is not only after death that men have been deified. Bantu chiefs are worshipped as gods during their lifetime as were the Egyptian Pharaohs and some of the Mesopotamian kings and Roman emperors.

#### NATURE-WORSHIP

It is convenient for purposes of analysis to distinguish between the mana-tabu conception, animism, the cult of the dead, and nature-worship, but in life these elements or 'moments' of early religion are not completely separable. The term 'nature-worship', though scarcely avoidable, is misleading, for in this sphere, too, we can perceive a stage prior to any clear conception of individuality in men or divine beings. From the writings of Professor Marcel Granet we may derive a vivid picture of the early life of the Chinese. Following him we may perhaps imagine primitive life in ancient China in some such way as this: the community is entirely agricultural; no clear distinction is drawn between the life of the family, of the cattle and of the crops; in the dark recesses of the house the grain is stored, and here too is placed the marriage couch; near by the dead are buried. All life comes from mother-earth; upon the earth, therefore, must the new-born child be placed, and upon the earth must the dying man be laid. Life follows a constant and well-defined rhythm. The work of men and women is sharply differentiated, and the year is divided into two portions, the dead season of moisture and the busy season of dry

weather; in the winter the women work at home, in the summer the men work in the fields. In each year were two great moments, in the spring when the men's work began and in the autumn when the women took up their tasks. At these times the completion of the work of weaving or of the ingathering of the harvest placed each family in a state of relative wealth; these were occasions, therefore, of rejoicing, of relaxation, of bounty and generosity. The festivals were celebrated at sacred places. Hither in the springtime the pilgrims repaired in their new holiday dresses. The animals, the birds, the flowers, all nature, in fact, seemed to join in the spirit of the time and speak a language which echoed man's own emotions. What wonder that man felt he was co-operating in the harmony of nature! The creative joy turned into a desire to adore; the object of adoration was the sacred soil, the trees and groves and fountains. By reaction from the normal peasant life, so hard and brutish, so empty and void of reflection, the sense of religious exaltation at these seasons was the greater. There were battles of flowers; engagements and marriages were arranged. The spirit of the time gave birth to poetry; in mock tournaments two opposing lines would advance rhythmically; challenges would be issued by each side with appropriate gestures and a distych of traditional verse; the wild animals of the sacred place would appear to join in the general sport, and with their cries and gambols would suggest the form of the human ritual. This ritual, too, based on the very suggestions of the sacred place and consecrated by tra-

dition, would come to be thought to have a compelling, automatic power, and what in life was more important than the return of spring, the bounty of the harvest? Gradually, by the long ritual, ecstasy would be induced with its natural sexual expression. Marriage might be celebrated at the springtime festival, but the young couples could not live together till after the autumn celebration, for during the time of the work in the fields the elders themselves were separated. The centre of the autumnal rite was the common table in the home, an orgy of feasting with the harvest gathered in. Here, too, songs were sung, the animals were mimicked, and ecstasy induced. None the less the autumnal festival was essentially different from that of the spring; in the autumn it was the heads of the community, the old folk, who presided; it was a festival of old age, of the year grown old; the time of cold and of frost was at hand, the dead season; man was again at one with nature.

This must not be taken as an exact picture of what happened in China, or anywhere else, but it indicates the general setting and rhythm of primitive agricultural life, where the two great distinctions are, first, between male and female, and, second, between the live season in the fields and the dead season between harvest and spring. The family, with its herds and crops, not the individual person, was still the unit; man was aware of himself as part of nature and at one with it. We are in the realm of feeling or of sentiment rather than of conscious reflection.

I cannot paint  
 What then I was. The sounding cataract  
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colours and their forms were then to me  
 An appetite, a feeling and a love,  
 That had no need of a remoter charm  
 By thought supplied or any interest  
 Unborrowed from the eye.

Here in the young poet is the same emotion purged of its cruder elements.

Very similar to the religion of early agricultural China is the picture of the first stage of Greek religion as depicted by Dr. Gilbert Murray in *Five Stages of Greek Religion*. Life, especially for primitive man, is very uncertain; it is constantly beset by unseen dangers; death or disaster may always be round the corner. Where we have been taught to think of 'germs', invisible, malignant, lurking in the air about us, the early Greek imagined invisible, winged creatures, *keres*, which at any time might attack him and which must if possible be warded off. So often the disasters of life are, as we say, 'just bad luck'; some things, it appears, are unlucky to see or to do; there are even people to-day amongst ourselves whose lives are seriously complicated and even inhibited by an endless number of meaningless 'superstitions' about the lucky and the unlucky, and this in spite of the scientific knowledge of the world which no modern man wholly lacks. But to primitive man the world is at every point full of mystery, of danger, of the arbitrary and the unforeseeable. His 'religion' then consists very largely in irra-

tional actions, absurd prohibitions, like the modern 'superstitions', with which he attempts to allay his fears and ward off troubles.

Primitive man has a profound reverence for the beasts which appear in some ways so much superior to himself; how nimble is the stag, how powerful the bull, how crafty the serpent, and how wise the owl appears! Each of the creatures has its own *mana*; let man then eat the beast, and he receives into himself the *mana* of his victim. Hence the many and gruesome rites whereby early man consumes the sacred victim raw while the life-force still is in it. Again, primitive ritual is a dance in which man imitates nature. In the leopard dance, for instance, the dancers will represent the leopard; the leader may be dressed in a leopard's skin; then he will *be* a leopard in a far more vivid sense than that of the child who says 'I am a bear'. A faint relic of this animal dancing survives with the Morris dancers, amongst whom the fox once took an important part. The leading dancer then in his animal skin is, at least for the moment, a divine being or, as the Greeks would say, '*theos*'; we generally translate this word 'god', but it is better to say 'a being touched with the divine, the mysterious, the infinite, the super-human'.

To the Greeks, too, the soil was mother-earth, but she was the mother who every springtime was a maiden and every year was a fruitful mother; the maidenhood followed the long dead season when she who was to come back with the flowers must be deemed as inhabiting the dark regions of

the dead. Hence the world-wide myths of the dying-rising god.

Another of the springtime dances among the Greeks was that of the initiate youths; it was called the dithyramb. It was the dance of Youth, and therefore suggested the Supreme or Archetypal Youth, the very spirit of the spring. Dionysus and Apollo, Hermes and Ares appear in Greek mythology as the Youth.

We speak still of the British lion, the Russian bear, of John Bull and Uncle Sam. This is not a mere literary conceit. Yet we should find it very difficult to define exactly what we mean by these figures. John Bull, we may say, is the spirit of England. John Bull is not a real person, but the spirit of England is a real thing. The deities of the old nature-mythologies have a somewhat similar existence; they are not merely code-names for the processes of nature, nor on the other hand are they to be regarded as well-defined, existent, super-human personalities. Granted, says G. K. Chesterton, that Adonis was a vegetation deity, no one is 'sufficiently interested in decaying vegetables' to make up such a story about them and disguise them under the image of a very handsome young man; so we must not say that 'Apollo killing the Python *means* that the summer drives out the winter' or 'the King dying in a western battle is a *symbol* of the sun setting in the west', for 'Jupiter does not mean thunder. Thunder means the march and victory of Jupiter. Neptune does not mean the sea; the sea is his, and he made it. In other words, what the savage really said about the sea was,

"Only my fetish Mumbo could raise such mountains out of mere water." What the savage really said about the sun was, "Only my great-great-grandfather Jumbo could deserve such a blazing crown." No doubt, 'what the savage really said', if by that we mean, 'what the savage really meant', is a speculative matter, but Chesterton is clearly right in claiming, for instance, that the myths of a dying-rising god are not merely an obscure code whereby primitive men told one another that the flowers come out in the spring, and that vegetation decays in autumn. There is some dim sense of God in these weird myths; they represent Nature seen with the light of the infinite and unchanging upon it, or Nature apprehended as in some way a mirror of the supersensible; we are in the sphere of poetry and of religion.

In ancient China and ancient Greece, as here depicted, we find fundamental ideas which in other parts of the world are developed in bewildering variety; in particular, the earth is the mother from whom comes all life, she is the goddess of fruitfulness. The earth is married to the sky, for from the sky comes the rain which fertilizes the earth. In the sky rides the sun that calls forth the crops and the flowers; hence the conception of the sky-god. Again, from the dust of the earth comes man, and to the dust he returns; mother-earth is intimately connected with the place of the departed. Then, the constantly recurring seasons of spring and autumn, themselves related to mother-earth, point to a mythology of a god who dies in the autumn and rises in the spring. This is brought

into relation with the earth as the abode of the departed, and hence arise cults bringing the dead into relation with the dying-rising god. Lastly, physical life, the life-force, the generative power, becomes an object of worship; hence in numberless cults sexual communion, as the source of all fruitfulness on earth and the cause of the world-order itself through the marriage of earth and sky, becomes the type, expression, or means, of union with the divine.

The variations played on these fundamental melodies are innumerable, but the differences are not important. Only by a sustained and instructed effort of historical imagination can we enter into the 'feel' of these strange rites and myths. Yet the key lies within ourselves, for there is a fundamental identity of human nature through the ages. There is, indeed, no 'missing link' in the chain of development between the first crude conception of the marriage of earth and sky and the philosophic insight of the poet:

I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns  
 And the round ocean and the living air,  
 And the blue sky and in the mind of man;  
 A motion and a spirit that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things.

#### THE HIGH GODS

If we think of religion as involving some sort of conscious communion between the individual soul

and God or the gods, there is much that falls under the headings of *mana-tabu*, of animatism, of ancestor worship and the cults of nature, which never rises to religion at all, since neither an individual soul nor a personal divine being is consciously conceived. Yet some dim sense of 'God' seems to be a universal element in religion. The evidence for this comes from primitive Africa and from Australia, from North America and from Oceania as well as from the peoples of Europe and Asia. Amongst all, or almost all, peoples we find traces at least of a belief in a Supreme Being who has made the world and all things, who is himself good and demands of men that they be good and self-sacrificing and moral. The forms of this belief vary greatly, but in substance so universal is it shown to be that for a time some scholars were tempted to postulate an original monotheism of the human race. This, no doubt, was a mistake, yet it appears that man everywhere, quite apart from animistic ideas, ancestor worship or nature cults, has a sense of 'God', and that this is intimately connected with ethics. The case is set forth with due caution by Dr. C. C. J. Webb:

'we are not committed [he writes] to a choice between admitting what we may call a primitive theism, in the modern sense of the word, and denying that from the very first there must have been implicit in the sentiment which expressed itself in religious observance a sense of having to do (if I may so put it) with the mysterious heart of things; a sense which it is hard for us to describe by words that do not presuppose a more advanced reflection, but without which it could not have given birth to religion as we know it in history and in our own experience.'

Hence we might admit that in the most primitive religion there was a recognition of what we may call a 'Supreme Being', if we mean by that very abstract phrase no more than it actually says, and prescind from those associations of a philosophical theology which it so readily calls up.'<sup>8</sup>

Thus a careful study has been made of the religion of the pygmies, who seem to be ethnologically the oldest people in the world, shyly dwelling in their forests and hardly affected, at least till recently, by outside influences, whether African or European. The distinguishing mark of their religion is the recognition and worship of a Supreme Being, Creator and Lord of the world; he is eternal, dwelling in heaven and having no temple on earth; he is omnipotent except in so far as evil has no touch with him; he is always helpful and the giver of every good gift to men; he is the author, the guardian and the vindicator of the moral law; he is worshipped with ethical submission; he is addressed with brief, personal prayers; only the first-fruits are offered to him. These pygmies do not worship natural phenomena; they are not animists or animatists; they do not worship their ancestors, and magic is little developed amongst them.

A similar type of religion has been found among the Bantus, where Christian or Moslem influences cannot be shown. Amongst them it is taught that God stretched his hand from heaven, and the earth was made; he spits, and things come into existence; he is creator of all; he lives in heaven above; since his completion of creation he has no more been seen of men. There is no talk of a time when he was

not nor of anything outside his jurisdiction nor of any struggle on his part for supremacy over the other deities or over the elemental forces of nature. He alone is lord of all; he is no blind Force or Necessity; there is moral order in the universe, and the Supreme Being has laid down the mutual connexions of all things in the world. He sees to it that man should have sustenance and light and warmth; he gives understanding; he is Providence, the giver of medicines, the Lord of life and death. All disasters and trials come upon men because of their ceasing to recognize him; he chastises them for their gluttony or quarrelsomeness, gives them *tabus* to teach them self-control, ordains that the best of them should rule over the rest, commands that the rich should listen to the poor and help them, that cripples should not be misused.

It must not be supposed, however, that such a faith constitutes the whole religion of the Bantus; indeed, this belief in a Supreme Being is in general to be found rather as a vague and traditional background of religious thought than as a practical element in religion. It is, however, certainly not a development of the cult of the dead or the dread of spirits which so often accompany it and virtually suppress it now; it may, indeed, be surmized to be an earlier faith which lingers only in memory, but some such faith, such sense of 'God' or the Great Spirit, is to be found in all quarters of the world. It corresponds with the worship of Shang-ti in China, a name which the early missionaries thought fit to take over as the translation of the Christian word for 'God'. It may be traced in the concep-

tion of Dyaus-pitar amongst the peoples of Aryan speech.

Such a conception of God corresponds closely with conscience. It is a great mistake to suppose that the ethical is a relatively late element in religion. The most primitive and almost universal rites of 'the ordeal' are an indication that man believed that, where his knowledge failed, the power or powers of the universe were on the side of right. It is, however, amongst the pygmies alone that this type of religion in the case of uncivilized people appears to be almost the whole of their religion. In few cases have the various types of religion hitherto considered been found in isolation; almost always *mana*-conceptions, animism, the cult of the dead, the rites of nature, and the conception of 'God' are confused in practice. It is likely, if not certain, that this sense of 'God' has coloured or influenced other types of religion, so that, if some reference conscious or unconscious to God be taken for the essence of religion, it is never possible to say that a cult or practice is wholly devoid of this religious element.

Such, then, are the main elements or 'moments' from which the more developed religions spring; it remains to trace, so far as we can, the development and interrelations of these ideas.

## CHAPTER II

### THE IMPERSONAL SACRED

FIVE different elements or 'moments' in 'primitive' religion have been considered. It is not possible to take each of these separately and show how the underlying idea has been developed, for each of them appeals to something deep in human nature; therefore in all advanced religions and all religious persons we may expect to find a harmony or at least a mixture of all these elements, the differences being primarily a matter of proportion. Moreover, the effective ideas and practices within any one religion rarely correspond with fidelity to the theoretical exposition of the religion. In this and the following chapters an attempt is made to show the development of the ideas which have been described in their embryonic form, but it must always be borne in mind that any such description involves a philosophizing about religion and an isolation of particular ideas from their setting in the total outlook of any particular person.

*Mana* has been defined as the impersonal sacred. It appears to be the lowest stage at which we can speak of religion at all, yet from it has been developed, not apart from outside influences, one of the subtlest philosophical religions of mankind. This development is to be seen in the religious history of India.

We may not speak of an Aryan race, but be-

yond question there is a group of languages, including Sanskrit, Avestan, Greek, Latin, and the various Celtic, Scandinavian and Slavonic dialects, so much akin that their resemblance clearly points back to a time when peoples who ultimately settled in Iran, India and Europe lived side by side. At one time they shared a common religion, for it is by no accident that the Father-God, *Jupiter*, in Latin corresponds with *Zeus pater* in Greek and *Dyaus pitar* in Sanskrit, or the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇ* with the Latin *flamen*. These peoples, too, have common myths sometimes agreeing in such detail that a common origin must be assumed; moreover, the *Rig-veda* (about 1000 B.C.), the earliest religious literature of India, reveals a religious outlook closely akin to that of the early Aryan-speaking peoples elsewhere. They began their journey together, but we shall see how widely their paths were destined to diverge.

#### HINDU PHILOSOPHY

The dominant word in the history of Hindu thought is *brahman*. In the *Rig-veda* the word normally means song, sacrificial formula, or incantation; etymologically it may be connected with the old Irish word *bricht*, meaning magic or spell, and the old Icelandic and Norse *brag-r*, which in the *Edda*, the ancient Norse literature, means 'poetry' and in Icelandic means 'melody'. The word *brahman*, says Dr. Barnett,

'is a neuter noun, and in the *Rig-veda* it means something that can only be translated by a long circumlocution. It may be rendered as "the power of ritual devotion";

that is to say, it denotes the mystic or magic force which is put forth by the poet-priest of the *Rig-veda* when he performs the rites of sacrifice with appropriate chanting of hymns—in short, ritual magic.<sup>1</sup>

*Brahman*, in fact, is the *mana* inherent in the ritual.

Even in the Vedic period *brahman* is strong and effective automatically and apart from the gods. The gods strengthen themselves by means of *brahman*; *brahman* can be used against the gods; by *brahman* a man can be rescued from the wrath of Varuna;<sup>2</sup> *brahman* is the power-substance in the strength of which the gods can exist and work; *brahman* constitutes the essence of the god Rudra;<sup>3</sup> Vishnu is filled with *brahman*; Prajapati, the creator, got himself strength by *brahman*.<sup>4</sup>

The first period of Indian religion is represented by the *Rig-veda*, the second by the *Brahmanas*. Here we learn that all created existence has arisen by emanation from the one Creative Principle, Prajapati, and is ultimately one with it. Prajapati is an incomprehensible, divine essence or creative force, in which are embodied the laws of Brahmanic ritual. The whole machinery of nature is worked and controlled by these ritual laws and therefore ultimately by the priest or *brāhman* who knows them; hence, as one of the *Brahmanas* puts it, 'verily there are two kinds of gods; for, indeed, the gods are the gods, and the Brahmins who have studied and teach sacred lore are the human gods'.<sup>5</sup> The baccalaureus in Goethe's *Faust* says, 'I brought the sun up from the sea', and the *brāhman* is satisfied that the sun would not arise did he not pour the due libation. Thus inevitably the gods

become mere shadows. The priest is more feared than they; the world is conceived as a great altar; the saint has become part of the world-sacrifice; he is one with *brahman*; he sacrifices to himself: 'I have put all worlds in myself [*atman*]. . . . All gods . . . all Vedas . . . all breath-powers have I put in myself'.<sup>6</sup> The development of thought may perhaps be conceived in some such way as this: first the ritual is a copying of nature; then it comes to be thought that the ritual in some way causes the processes of nature; thus the priests, who alone know the ritual, become the causes of nature. Man takes the place of God.

The third phase of classical Indian religion is represented by the *Upanishads*. These are of various dates, and it is only by taking a very general view that we can speak of them as containing a common doctrine. They are in general later than the *Brahmanas*. They may be regarded as representing a lay, anti-Brahmanic philosophy, but perhaps more probably we should suppose that the speculative intellects of the writers of the *Upanishads* formulated a philosophy out of the heterogeneous ideas they received from the *Brahmanas*. It is important to bear in mind that behind the obscure logic and arid metaphysic of the *Upanishads* lie a religious sense and a religious demand; thus an often-repeated prayer first found in the oldest of them is, 'lead me from the unreal to the real; lead me from darkness to light; lead me from death to immortality'.<sup>7</sup>

Between the *Rig-veda* and the *Upanishads* something had happened to the soul of India. The re-

ligion of the *Rig-veda* is world-affirming and naïvely optimistic; the religion of the *Upanishads* is world-denying and profoundly pessimistic. This pessimism may have many roots; it may be connected with political, geographical and climatic conditions; but in view of the close connexion of the philosophy of the *Upanishads* with the *Brahmanas*, it is natural to suppose that in part at least the devastating pessimism and scepticism of Indian thought is due to the nemesis of religion turned to magic. The *Brahmanas* give us the *mana* conception elaborated into a vast sacrificial system; the *Upanishads* represent the impersonal sacred in the form of speculation. Evil belongs to the very nature of the world, which is something to be escaped from, not to be explained. This depreciatory judgement of the world is a matter not of argument but of assumption in the *Upanishads*; pessimism, as Dr. W. S. Urquhart says, 'has not only set the problem of Indian thought but prejudiced the issue and dictated the conclusion'.<sup>8</sup> 'To the man of discernment [as we read in the *Yoga Sutra*] everything is misery.'<sup>9</sup>

To this philosophy of pessimism must be added the conception called *ekagrata* or one-pointedness or concentration of thought in meditation. The underlying idea may be conveniently illustrated from the old substance-philosophy. Thus, if we take away from an orange its sensible qualities, its colour, taste, density and shape, what is left is the underlying 'substance', the thing in itself apart from its 'accidents'. Perform the same mental operation upon an apple; it is then easy to suppose that what differentiates an orange from an apple

is its sensible qualities; the two fruits may be supposed to be of identical substance but of different attributes or accidents. Let the principle be universalized, and we find that all things are identical in substance and different only in attributes. An orange thus is an apple in a different form, and man is an apple, and an apple is a table, and everything is substantially identical with everything else. Every self is ultimately identical with every other self. Every particular in the world is simply a manifestation of the One; is the One in a particular form. Thus I am *brahman*, the apple is *brahman*, everything is *brahman*; all differentiation is illusion. To know this ultimate identity of all things and by this knowledge to be merged in the One behind the manifold of sense is the way of deliverance from the world. Not only is every soul ultimately identical with every other, but the soul itself is impersonally conceived. It is a thing, a spark of the divine fire, a drop of the infinite ocean; it can appear and reappear in an infinite number of forms, being reincarnated now as a man, now as a beast, now as a plant or a god.

Thus the doctrine of *karma* (literally 'action') or transmigration is intimately associated with the philosophy of the *Upanishads*. Every embodied soul is exactly working out the due reward of its deeds in a previous incarnation; there is no injustice in the varying lot of men, for life is expiation. Memory is not constitutive of personality, nor do other persons through love become in any sense part of the soul, which is an individual and ultimately a suffering thing caught in the endless cycle of births

and rebirths. The process may be set forth as a vindication of eternal justice, but the heart of man cries out for deliverance. If expiation must be made for deeds, the way of escape will be to refrain from deeds. Let man, then, abandon the sensible world which is the sphere of the unreal, and let him by the life of asceticism sink back into the actionless, unconscious consciousness of *brahman*. Salvation then is by knowledge and passivity.

Even in the time of the *Rig-veda* there had been a certain ecstatic mysticism connected with the sacred and highly intoxicating *soma*-drink. The primitive type of inspiration in which consciousness and individuality are lost in the temporary bliss of intoxication leads not unnaturally to an impersonal mysticism. Moreover, it was early discovered that fasting and various hypnotic practices induce ecstasy. Life being deemed an unending misery every effort was made by the practices of asceticism to achieve isolation from the world of sense.

Thus in the general thought of the *Upanishads* there are two fundamental principles, the denial of the ultimate reality of distinctions in the world, and the identification of the human spirit with the divine, which is impersonal. Salvation is to be achieved not by the development of personality but by knowledge and a technique for sinking back through trance or ecstasy into the primal unity of the undifferentiated.

' For where there is as it were duality, then one sees the other, one smells the other, one hears the other, one perceives the other; but when the Self only is all this,

how should he smell another, how should he see another, how should he hear another, how should he salute another, how should he perceive another, how should he know another? How should he know Him by whom he knows all this? How, O beloved, should he know (himself), the Knower?<sup>10</sup>

There is an Indian musical instrument much like a very large guitar. The skilled player produces with his left hand in the treble the most marvellous trills and tropes and runs and flourishes, using tones and semi-tones and demi-semi-tones. Meanwhile with his right hand he maintains in the bass a steady unchanging thrum or drone. Such music is the counterpart of the philosophy or religion which to this day is the Vedantist's gospel. The subtleties and intricacies and variations of the treble correspond with the infinitely various world of sense, its colours, sounds, scents, flavours and unending changes; it is the world of unreality and illusion. The drone of the bass represents the One, the Eternal, the Immutable, the All, the unconscious consciousness of *brahman*. To fall back behind the manifold of sense to the One, to the ultimate identity of all things, is deliverance, the goal of desire and of religion. It is clear that the All and the Nothing lie close together here, and accordingly in the *Brhadaranyaka* we find Scotus Erigena's doctrine, 'God on account of his excellence may not improperly be called No-thing'.<sup>11</sup> Yet the ideal of absorption in the One which is both the All and the Nothing is not, or is not always, regarded as the losing of the self 'in the dead matter of an unspiritual universe'; the ultimate principle may

be regarded as spiritual and positive; possibly the identification of the self with *brahman* tends to make *brahman* more personally conceived. But there is little scope here for a quasi-theistic movement; *brahman* is not personal, and that which we mean by personality is regarded as part of the illusion and unreality of the world of sense. If *brahman* is said to be spiritually conceived, the spiritual in such a connexion can mean little more than the immaterial. *Brahman* cannot rightly be worshipped, for in worshipping *brahman*, we are simply worshipping ourselves. Hence the theistic elements in the *Upanishads*, as Dr. Urquhart says, 'are comparatively few and are unable to detach themselves from the surrounding pantheism'.<sup>12</sup> The philosophy of the *Upanishads* is the world of the impersonal sacred.

In the year 1656 sixty of the *Upanishads* were translated into Persian. They became known to Europe only in 1801 through a Latin version of the Persian made by Anquetil Duperron. They proved an intoxicating wine in the West, and to thinkers like Schelling and Schopenhauer they appeared to offer the last word of human wisdom. But they rest upon a fundamental pessimism which in general is antipathetic to European thought. To the Vedantist the world is illusion and ultimately meaningless; to the Zoroastrian, as we shall see, that same world is a battleground between Good and Evil; to the Platonist, again, the world is the distorting mirror of eternal verities. The divergence between these views lies deeper than disagreement upon arguments. Yet the ancestors

of all these once lived a common life worshipping the genial gods of nature in the first home of the Aryan peoples.

Hinduism is a vast religious amalgam including almost every type of religion from the crudest animism and fear of demons to the sublime and abstract speculations of the pantheist metaphysical philosophers. But certain leading ideas of the classical Indian tradition such as the unreality of the world of sense, the ultimate identity of all things, *karma*, and redemption as deliverance from the cycle of rebirths have passed deep into the consciousness of Indians and qualify in various ways the attitude of the people to the innumerable gods and spirits of the Hindu pantheon.

#### BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

Buddhism, as it appears in history, is not less than Hinduism an amalgam. In respect of its 'orthodox' doctrine it likewise falls for consideration under the heading of the impersonal sacred, for the denial of the soul or personality is of the essence of this form of religion.

Gautama, Sankhyamuni, or the Buddha, is one of the great figures of man's spiritual history. He was born about 560 B.C., that is, about a generation after the death of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster and the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah. His mother died when he was a child; her place was taken by his sister. He was of noble birth; his education consisted rather in bodily exercises than in the wisdom of the Vedas. He was married and had a son who afterwards became a Buddhist monk. That

is substantially all that is known of his youth. At the age of twenty-nine he left home to adopt a spiritual life. Seven years were to pass in search before he made his great discovery and appeared as the Buddha, the Emancipated, the Emancipator of gods and men. First he entrusted himself to two spiritual teachers, who, according to the ideas of the day, sought by various pathological experiences to bring him to the state of absorption. But being unsatisfied he left them. He next entered upon a period of severest ascetic practices. Realizing at last that asceticism brought no peace he took nourishment to revive himself. Then at last in the night, as he sat under the fig-tree (which came to be known as the tree of knowledge and was not completely destroyed till storms swept it away in 1876), illumination came to him; he understood the cause of misery and the way to overcome it. Seven days he remained in meditation under the sacred tree, and then set out as a teacher. A teacher he remained for some forty years, but we have no biography of him, no chronological account of his doings, only the record of a number of incidents and discourses. Year by year he travelled on foot, resting during the rainy months when travelling was impossible. He was almost always accompanied by a large crowd of disciples. Even when his name was famous throughout India, he was still to be found daily going from alley to alley, house to house, bowl in hand, silent with downcast eyes, waiting for a bite of food to be put into his bowl. He lived to be eighty years of age and died a little before or a little after 480 B.C.

He came before men as a religious reformer. He discredited the sacrifices and attacked with bitter irony the learning of the Vedic scribes as madness if not actually a swindle. On what ground do Brahmins boast their birth? In hair, eyes, feet they are no different from other men. When a man repeats the songs and sayings of the ancient wise men, and fancies himself a wise man, he is like a little man or a slave who sets himself on the king's throne and recites the king's speech and fancies himself a king.<sup>13</sup>

The Buddha was not a speculative philosopher but rather a psychologist and evangelist. World suffering was his theme.

'And what, ye disciples, have I proclaimed to you? What suffering is, ye disciples, I have proclaimed to you. What is the origin of suffering, ye disciples, I have proclaimed to you. What is the removal of suffering, ye disciples, have I proclaimed to you.'

'As the sea, ye disciples, is penetrated with one taste only, the taste of salt, so also, ye disciples, this doctrine and this rule is penetrated with one taste only, the taste of release.'<sup>14</sup>

The four sacred truths of Buddhism all deal with suffering, its origin, its removal and the means thereto. Why can men not see that all suffering comes from that which is dear to them? Therefore the way of wisdom is to die to the world of sense by the quenching of desire. Our existence, which from first to last is suffering, is like a flame, which cannot be extinguished while it is still being fed; or, again, our existence is the ebb and flow of this transient world; it is removed by the destruction

of the will. Thus weariness of life and a negative morality, as Jeremias says, are at the very heart of Buddhism.

The Buddha denied the reality of the soul or self. Seeing, hearing and suffering, of course, are facts, but strictly there is no 'I' which sees and hears and suffers. In a famous passage in the *Milindapanha*, the venerable Nagasena leads the king Milinda to deny that there is really any such thing as a chariot. The king admits that the various parts of the chariot, pole, axle, wheels, yoke, reins and goad, are not singly or together the chariot, nor is the chariot something else beside these parts. 'Your majesty, although I question you very closely, I fail to discover any chariot. Verily, now your majesty, the word chariot is a mere empty sound'. The king admits that 'the word "chariot" is but a way of counting, term, appellation, convenient designation and name for pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body and banner-staff'. Whereupon Nagasena explains that the person called Nagasena is a mere name for the parts of his body, his perceptions, predispositions and consciousness, 'but in the absolute sense there is no Ego here to be found'.<sup>15</sup>

It might seem difficult to bring such a doctrine under the heading of religion at all, but, albeit in defiance of logic, the Buddha was offering a salvation that was intended to satisfy the infinite yearnings of the heart of man. He denied the reality of the self or soul, yet there was some sort of entity, he taught, which continues and is reincarnated again and again till it wins to deliverance. 'To

say, "the living entity persists" is to fall short of the truth; to say, "it is annihilated" is to outrun the truth.<sup>16</sup> *Nirvana*, to which those who are emancipated attain, is somehow blessedness rather than annihilation. " "*Nirvana* is blessedness, *Nirvana* is blessedness", says Sariputta, and when asked, "How can here be blessedness, since here is no feeling?" he answered, "It is in this that it is blessedness, that here is no feeling".<sup>17</sup> The cessation of toothache is beatitude.

The Buddha was not a moral reformer, for Buddhist ethics are directed solely to the deliverance of the agent; he was not a political reformer, for the Buddhist turns his back upon the world, even upon his family. The existence of the gods is not denied, but salvation is not won by union with God or a personal relationship with God. We are still in the sphere of the impersonal sacred. As will appear later, however, it was not in this form that Buddhism has become a world-religion.

#### EPICURUS

The European counterpart of the Buddha would seem to be the Greek sage Epicurus, who was born in 342 or 341 B.C. and died in 270 B.C. The fundamental pessimism of his outlook, however, is to be explained, not by climatic conditions or the substitution of magic for religion or the development of speculation, but by historical circumstances. Earlier Greek writers manifest an optimistic spirit. Herodotus is among the most cheerful of storytellers, and Aeschylus, for all his sense of tragedy and ineluctable destiny, is far from despairing of

the world. But after the disasters of the Peloponnesian war and the collapse of the city-state, the thoughts of men turned inward upon the soul and, on the whole, away from history. Moreover, Epicurus himself as a 'displaced person' knew fear as the great enemy; he was conscious of no security in this world or the next. Like the Buddha he was evangelist and psychologist rather than philosopher; like the Buddha he did not deny the existence of the gods but regarded them simply as a part of nature; like the Buddha his teaching rested upon pessimism about human life; like the Buddha, too, he denounced the philosophers of his day and gathered about him a 'religious' community. Epicurus supposed that this world and countless other worlds have come to exist 'automatically' by the chance clashes of innumerable atoms moving with immense velocity through the void. There is no such thing as Providence. There is no future life for man, and death is a ceasing to be. Everything that really exists is material; sensation is the ultimate reality for man. Let man, then, not fear the gods and not become embroiled in the abortive metaphysical speculations of the schools. He is not at the mercy of fate. Let him, so far as possible, 'escape Life's notice'. That which is desirable in life is pleasure, nor is this beyond man's reach if only he be prudent. 'Epicureanism' is popularly understood to mean the pursuit of the immediate pleasure of the appetites. This is far from the doctrine of Epicurus, who never bade men directly seek pleasure and assured them they could not find happiness unless they lived wisely.

and nobly, causing no man sorrow. He dwelt much on the pleasure of memory; he was a man of great personal charm with a wide human sympathy, who summoned his unnumbered friends of both sexes in Athens and elsewhere out of the turmoil of politics and the strife of cities to an inward calm resting upon the contemplation of things beautiful and good, a peace which may be enjoyed by the truly philosophic mind through any pains that life or man may bring. The happiness that he offered men was 'a grave and solemn pleasure—a quiet unobtrusive ease of heart, but not exuberance and excitement'. Let man live simply and contentedly in the present, fearing no hereafter, avoiding needless contacts with the world and turning so far as possible an inattentive mind from the abiding, ineradicable sorrows and cares of life—such was Epicurus' 'medicine of salvation', as one of his followers put it;<sup>18</sup> so shall man enjoy 'happiness with a glad heart';<sup>19</sup> thus man by victory over the world is made divine.<sup>20</sup> Epicureanism, here utterly unlike Buddhism, is a religion of a sensitive aestheticism. Such a faith or lack of faith may seem scarcely to come under the heading of religion; yet the Epicurean way of life, simple, kindly, unpretentious, contented, given to the contemplation of things lovely and of good report might, says Walter Pater, 'come even to seem a kind of religion—an inward, mystic, visionary piety or religion, by virtue of its effort to live days "lovely and pleasant" in themselves, here and now, and with an all-sufficiency of well-being in the immediate sense of the object contemplated, independently of

any faith or hope that might be entertained as to their ulterior tendency. In this way, the true æsthetic culture would be realizable as a new form of the contemplative life, founding its claim on the intrinsic "blessedness" of "vision"—the vision of perfect men and things.<sup>21</sup> Epicureanism with its pathos, beauty and dignity must have its place amongst man's spiritual achievements in the sphere of the impersonal sacred and the religions of ultimate despair.

'Conceded that what is secure in our existence is but the sharp apex of the present moment between two hypothetical eternities, and all that is real in our experience but a series of fleeting impressions . . . given that we are never to get beyond the walls of the closely shut cell of one's own personality, that the ideas we are somehow compelled to form of an outer world and of other minds akin to our own are, it may be, but a day-dream, and the thought of any world beyond a day-dream perhaps idler still, then he at least in whom those fleeting impressions—faces, voices, material sunshine—were very real and imperious, might well set himself to the consideration how such actual moments as they passed might be made to yield their utmost by the most dexterous training of capacity. Amid abstract metaphysical doubts as to what might lie one step only beyond that experience, re-enforcing the deep original materialism or earthliness of human nature itself, bound so intimately to the sensuous world, let him at least make the most of what was "here and now". In the actual dimness of ways from means to ends—ends in themselves desirable, yet for the most part distant and for him certainly below the visible horizon—he would at all events be sure that the means, to use the well-worn terminology, should have something of finality or perfection about them, and themselves partake, in a measure, of the more excellent nature of ends—that the means should justify the end.'<sup>21</sup>

This imaginative passage from Walter Pater does not pretend to give the very words and thoughts of Epicurus, but it indicates the sense in which 'Epicureanism' has been said to be the religion of such figures of European history as Molière, Rousseau and Voltaire, and might be claimed to-day as the religion of the noblest of those who in all the speculative reaches of religion declare themselves Agnostic.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RELIGION OF NATURE

IF in India the impersonal sacred becomes the groundwork of a philosophical religion, in China the worship of Nature attains its most philosophical development. The rendering of the classical Chinese literature in English presents the translator with particular hazards and difficulties. No one without direct familiarity with the Chinese literary tradition would safely venture an opinion upon the niceties of its philosophical thought, but even the English reader can recognize that, wide as are the divergencies of the Chinese philosophers, certain fundamental and typical ideas reappear in them and mould their thought, as in India such conceptions as *karma* and the unreality of the sensible world and pantheism have pervaded the thought of many schools.

#### CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

It has already been indicated that man's life in most primitive China corresponded with the annual rhythm of nature, which itself seemed to depend upon the two underlying principles of male and female. Human life was an aspect, a mirror, an imitation of the mysterious processes of Nature. Chinese religious life even before the disintegrating impact of western civilization was far from uniform.

Elements taken from Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, blended with all manner of animistic cults, formed the mixture which was the actual 'religion' of millions in China. What follows therefore is not a description of the actual religion or faith of any Chinese person but an account of a philosophical or religious outlook underlying the long and varied history of Chinese thought and radically connected with the primitive apprehension of the rhythm of Nature and of man's place in it.

A dominant word in Chinese philosophy is *Tao*, which is usually translated 'Way'. The natural English philosophical equivalent, however, in very many cases would be 'Nature'. To live according to the *Tao* is to live according to Nature. The word *Tao* has its parallel in the Sanskrit root *rita*, from which comes our word 'rite'; *rita* means ordinance and points to a universal order. The idea of the Way has its place in Buddhism as also in Christianity, for it would seem that the Christians were known at first as the people of the Way, but nowhere has this conception been worked out into a profound philosophical principle as in China.

Nature or the *Tao* is the all-embracing mystery, the source and meaning of all things that are, the hidden force that orders the entire universe. It is invisible; it is eternal; it is inaudible; it is nameless; it is yet all-pervading and the source of all life; it is the principle of the unity of all things, the archetypal Pattern; it is the Idea of the Good, as Plato would say, which is partially revealed in all manifest goods.

' Before heaven and earth were produced, there was that which was formless, yet complete . . . it might well be the mother of all beneath heaven. Its real name we know not; we call it the Way that we may be able to express it. . . . Man models himself on the earth, the earth models itself on Heaven, Heaven models itself on the Way, but the Way models itself on being what it is.'<sup>1</sup>

It cannot be talked about; ' who can know the argument which is not put into speech and the *Tao* that has no name?'<sup>2</sup> It is ' the form of the formless, the image of the imageless'; all knowledge conforms to it, all events are due to it; it upholds the sky and affords the pole-star its majesty; it orders the procession of the seasons; inaudible and invisible in itself it is to be inferred from its effects.<sup>3</sup> The *Tao*, in fact, is the Logos, the all-pervading Reason quasi-personally conceived: ' skill goes along with a round of duties, these duties with justice, justice with spiritual power in a man, this spiritual power with the *Tao*, the *Tao* with Heaven'; how overwhelming it is in its ' supremacy'; the wise man, the man of principle, will open his heart to its influence.<sup>4</sup> The *Tao* or, as we should say, Nature, is the supreme power in the universe, yet it works in a great humility. It is like water, which profits all creatures without striving with them; it takes always the lowest place; ' humility is the very house of the *Tao*'.<sup>5</sup>

' The *Tao* has reality and evidence, but it has no (specific) action, no specific form. It can be transmitted, but it cannot be (consciously) received. It can be attained, but it cannot be seen (when it is obtained). It is self-rooted and existed before the heavens and the earth. From of

old it has continued without ceasing. It is the gods, the Divine Ruler. It produced the heavens: it produced the earth. It is above the highest and lowest points in space, although it is neither high nor low. Existing before the heavens and the earth and older than the oldest antiquity, it is neither old nor shows signs of age.'<sup>6</sup>

The *Tao* 'binds all space together' and contains within itself the male and the female principles.<sup>7</sup> The *Yin* and the *Yang*, the Male and the Female, are the great principles of heaven and earth. The falling of the rain, for instance, is the work of the Male principle; its stopping is the work of the Female; all this is 'profoundly mysterious'.<sup>8</sup> There is no single orthodox doctrine of the *Tao*, and these quotations are taken from very diverse philosophical systems, but they have sufficient homogeneity to represent in some degree a widespread and distinctively Chinese outlook.

We may attempt to translate this conception into terms more familiar to us: Nature is a whole, a universe, ultimately proceeding from one, single, hidden and mysterious principle. The Pattern of the whole is expressed in many subsidiary patterns, but all things are ordered according to their kind by the one hidden yet pervading principle. The universe, we might say, is a variable system subject to law. This, so far, is a properly scientific outlook upon the world, but it is as remote as possible from scientific materialism; it is fundamentally a religious conception. For, in the first place, it is inseparable from a sense of wonder, of awe, of reverence; in the second, it includes and informs man's moral duty to his fellow-man and

to Heaven; while, third, Heaven is at least quasi-personally conceived.

Intimately related to Nature, *Tao*, is Heaven, *Tien*. Thus, after suggesting the parallel between the humility of water (what a Franciscan idea!) and the humility of the *Tao*, the poet continues, 'when everything goes well, put yourself in the background: that is the way Heaven acts'.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Heaven, as Mr. E. R. Hughes says, is 'the transcendental side to Nature'. Heaven does not speak but acts.<sup>10</sup> It is quasi-personally conceived, for we may speak either of the Way (*Tao*) of Heaven,<sup>11</sup> or, more commonly, of the Will of Heaven: 'if the *Tao* is to prevail, it is the Will of Heaven. If it is to be set aside, it is, again, the Will of Heaven'.<sup>12</sup> Heaven may even be regarded as Father.<sup>13</sup> But there is no penetrating the ultimate mystery: 'the true sage does not try to know Heaven'.<sup>14</sup>

The sublimity of this conception may be seen by contrast with the widespread cult of Mother Nature in the guise of the Mother of the gods in pre-Christian Europe and Asia Minor, a lascivious fertility-cult, or with the cosmic dance of Shiva in India. The Chinese from ancient times have had a sense of Heaven and of the will of Heaven for man and all the natural order, a semi-personal Being always to be reverenced, always to be obeyed, giving order, meaning and purpose to the cosmic process. The concept of Heaven is profoundly religious but entirely undogmatic. A sage, Tzu Ssu, of the third century before Christ, might write, in Platonic terms, that Heaven is the Real,

man is but coming-to-be-real,<sup>15</sup> yet there remains the profound agnosticism of men overwhelmed by the majesty and the mystery of Nature: 'a true sage does not try to know Heaven'. Because of this abandonment of theological issues Chinese philosophy, and particularly the teaching of Confucius, has been regarded as irreligious, but this is a misunderstanding. It is a reverent and religious agnosticism, undogmatic but not wholly agnostic. The Chinese philosopher looking at the immensity of the stars might echo the Hebrew poet, 'behold these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him!' When Confucius was asked the meaning of the great sacrifice, he answered, 'I do not know';<sup>16</sup> yet 'he sacrificed to the dead as if they were present. He sacrificed to the spirits as if the spirits were present',<sup>17</sup> and said, 'He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray'. What indeed is man but a lost soul in this universe if there is none to whom he can pray? 'My doctrine,' said Confucius, 'is that of an all-pervading unity.'<sup>18</sup> What, then, is wisdom? 'To give oneself earnestly to the duties due to men, and, while respecting spiritual things, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom.'<sup>19</sup> Hence he avoided spiritual things as a topic of conversation,<sup>20</sup> yet he was very particular about religious duties,<sup>21</sup> and confessed that 'Heaven produced the virtue that is in me'.<sup>22</sup> Nor was his religion a matter of observance only but also of faith, as appears from his saying, 'while Heaven does not let the cause of truth perish, what can the people of K'wang do to me?'<sup>23</sup> 'I do not murmur

against Heaven,' he said, ' I do not grumble against men. My studies lie low, and my penetration rises high. But there is Heaven—that knows me!' <sup>24</sup>

This vast, mysterious, moving Nature is not an impersonal system over against which stands man, a being of another order; he is part of Nature; his happiness, the realization of his humanity, depend upon his living in consonance with that Nature which appoints the Way for him as for the stars, the mountains, the beasts and flowers. Nature is a harmony or equilibrium, and it behoves man to enter into that state. This he may do by subjecting himself to the universal rhythm in conforming to the 'ritual'. Heaven and earth present an hierarchic order. 'Music expresses the harmony of Heaven and Earth, Ritual the hierarchic order in Heaven and Earth. Since there is this harmony, the hundred (species) of things (in Nature) are evolved. Since there is this order, these things as a whole are distinguishable among themselves. (Thus) the creation of music originates in Heaven, whilst the Earth gives to Ritual its law of control.' <sup>25</sup> Ritual covers not merely the sacrifices due to Heaven but also filial piety, reverence for self, the right relation to the earth, the due respect of rulers. This ritual represents the nature and law of the universe. Let the ritual of marriage, for instance, be discarded, and the result is chaos.<sup>26</sup> Let man, therefore, live according to nature—but in how different a sense from that of Rousseau! For with the Chinese philosophers life according to Nature means accepting the pattern of traditional society, with its conventions, customs and duties, as the

rhythm of summer and winter, rain and sunshine, are accepted. Ultimate questions may be raised, but they cannot be answered; a wise man will eschew them with agnostic reverence, not agnostic scepticism. If man could not penetrate to the last secrets, at least the lines of his duty were plain. 'Wealth and high office—these are what men desire, but, if they cannot be obtained in conformity with the *Tao*, they must not be held', said Confucius.<sup>27</sup> The proper virtue of human nature is 'human-heartedness'; this, said Mencius, 'is man's abode of peace; and righteousness is man's true path'.<sup>28</sup> Asked about human-heartedness Confucius replied, 'in public behave as you would in the presence of an honoured guest. Set the people their public tasks as if you were conducting a great sacrifice. The treatment you would not have for yourself, do not proffer to other people.'<sup>29</sup>

#### STOIC PHILOSOPHY

The *Tao* may often best be translated into English thought as 'Nature'. Whence do we derive our thought of Nature as the mysterious Being or organizing principle of all things, and conceive Nature not indeed as a goddess but in a quasi-personal way, as when we say 'Nature is the source of instinct in all creatures', or 'Nature is concerned with the species, not the individual'? The idea comes into European thought through the Stoics, whose teaching has profoundly influenced Christian thought. The Greek word for nature is *physis*: every species that exists has its own 'nature'; its nature is that which it is

principle, that which it has in it to be or to become. The nature of an acorn is to be an oak; the nature of a foal is to be a horse; the nature of a man is not merely to have the usual organs and capacities of a man but to realize through these what man ought to be. A thing is in harmony with its nature, said the Stoics,

‘when it is determined by its own Ruling Principle, by the highest thing in it; a plant, for instance, by the principle of vegetable life (which is called “nature” in the narrower sense), a beast by its animal soul, and a man by reason. The “ruling principle” in man is reason, a detached part of the Cosmic Reason. It is therefore well with a man only when his Ruling Principle is in a right state and really governs his being; when that is the case, he possesses all good.’<sup>30</sup>

Zeno, the founder of the Stoics, who flourished towards the end of the fourth century before Christ, taught that the whole universe forms the substance of God, who is a kind of fiery air, endowed with Mind whereby he governs the universe: ‘God runs through the material world, as honey runs through the honeycomb’; throughout the universe there operates a Law, which is identical with Reason and with God; ‘God, Mind, Destiny, Zeus—it is One Thing which is called by these and many other names’; there is then a World-soul wherein our individual soul-life participates; ‘good men are divine, for they have, as it were, God within them’.<sup>31</sup> Stoicism then is an interpretation of the physical world, a kind of theology and a basis of ethical life combined into one philosophical theory of Nature which is closely akin to the Chinese conception of the *Tao*.

‘ To “ live according to virtue ” is the same thing as to live “ according to practical acquaintance with the processes of Nature ”. . . . For our natures are parts of the Universal Nature. Hence, it becomes the end (of human action) so to live as to “ follow Nature ”—that is, to live according to our own nature and according to Universal Nature, never engaging in any activity which is forbidden by the General Law, which is the Right Reason pervading the universe, identical with God (Zeus), the head of the whole administration of the world.’<sup>32</sup>

The Stoic, it will be observed, uses a personal term, Zeus or God, where the Chinese philosophers spoke only of Heaven, a more neutral term, but the distinction would seem to be little. Dr. Gilbert Murray thus sums up this aspect of Stoicism: ‘ *Physis* or nature’, he writes, ‘ is at work everywhere. It is like a soul, or a life-force, running through all matter as the “ soul ” or life of a man runs through all his limbs. It is the soul of the world ’; in Zeno’s time, he continues, the natural sciences had made great advances;

‘ this fact had made people familiar with the notion of natural law. Law was a principle which ran through all the movements of what they called the *Kosmos*, or “ ordered world ”. Thus *Physis*, the life of the world, is, from another point of view, the Law of Nature; it is the great chain of causation by which all events occur. . . . A natural law, yet a natural law which is alive, which is itself life. It becomes indistinguishable from a purpose, the purpose of the great world-process. It is like a foreseeing, fore-thinking power—*Pronoia*. . . . As a principle of providence or forethought it comes to be regarded as God, the nearest approach to a definite personal God which is admitted by the austere logic of Stoicism. And, since it must be in some sense material, it is made of the finest material there is; it is made of fire, not ordinary

fire, but what they called intellectual fire. A fire which is present in a warm, live man, and not in a cold, dead man; a fire which has consciousness and life, and is not subject to decay. This fire, *Physis*, God, is in all creation.' <sup>33</sup>

But, when Dr. Murray goes on to say, 'we are led to a very definite and complete Pantheism', he may be misleading. The strict pantheist will say, as a devout Hindu once said in my presence, 'I meditate upon that piece of paper as God'; to him everything is God, and everything equally God; all appearances are deceptive, for God is everything and everything is God. That is rather a denial of Nature than a worship of Nature. The Stoic or Chinese philosopher is aware of rhythm, movement, pattern running through all things, a reason and a life that pervades the universe which in spite of all its manifold varieties is somehow the expression of one inscrutable divine Purpose with which the good man must consciously identify himself. As an acceptance of the reality of the world both as rational and as affording a basis for the ethical life this philosophy is radically different from strict Pantheism.

This conception of Nature and of the universe, as we have seen, has its roots in the most primitive life of man, who imitates Nature and knows himself only as a part of Nature; it flowers in the philosophy of the Chinese sages; it reappears in Stoicism, the noblest form of religion known to Europe before the advent of Christianity; it would seem to answer to apprehensions deep in the heart of man, since we find it to-day, though rarely explicitly set forth, as the practical, working faith of those re-

ligious thinkers of the modern 'scientific' world who admit no ecclesiastical allegiance. It is, so to say, an agnostic religion of Development; it finds its most distinctive modern expression in the 'Creative Evolution' of Henri Bergson. It is the religion of those who would sorrowfully declare with the Chinese sage that Heaven only acts, it does not speak. Man's inferences from the Nature of which he can know so little are so insecure, and the faith of these men of religion has been so much more secure than their premisses seemed to warrant, that we might be justified in the conclusion that even to them Heaven has spoken, though in a low and secret voice. For it is a question whether what we have called 'the religion of Nature' really becomes religion at all unless it is touched with that sense of 'God' which is not derived from Nature but seems of itself to dawn even upon most 'primitive' man.

#### ASTROLOGY

The Chinese conception of *Tao* and the Stoic of Nature are far exalted above the ideas of the 'nature religions' amongst peoples who in other respects have attained a high degree of civilization. These may be illustrated by the religion of ancient Babylonia, which ultimately influenced and, through the astrologers of our less reputable daily Press, still influences European thought.

In Babylonian religion the purely animistic stage seems to have been transcended before the dawn of history. The gods were personified natural powers such as moon and sun, storm and water. 'The

whole civilization', writes Dr. W. L. Wardle, 'was profoundly religious in character'; all knowledge of arts and crafts, all culture and civilization, came from the gods, but religion in any profound sense of awe and reverence was hardly possible when the gods, interpreted in the light of the fickleness of Nature, were inevitably regarded as capricious; a god with whom one cannot enter into some personal relationship of trust is rather a demon than a god. In the absence of a sense of Law running through all things, man's chief concern tended to be the discovery of the unfathomable but irrational will of the mutually discordant gods. Hence divination became a prevailing interest. Those who to-day believe, or half believe, in palmistry should be able to understand the fascination and influence of hepatoscopy or divination through the liver of a sheep. After the development of this pseudo-science came astrology. The original idea here was not that of a parallelism or causal connexion between celestial and terrestrial events; it was rather an attempt through reading 'the signs of the times' to ascertain the probabilities of the future; it rested not upon the uniformity but upon the arbitrariness of nature. Not only the regular movements of the heavenly bodies but any unusual events, such as haloes round the moon, storms, hail, rain, thunder and lightning, were observed and included in astrological calculations on the assumption that if a victory or defeat had been sustained under such and such conditions, a repetition of those conditions would bring the same result again. Observation, it should be remembered, was in its

infancy, and astronomical prediction within wide margins was uncertain. Jastrow says, for instance, that 'the period, according to scientific investigation, between the heliacal setting of Venus and her heliacal rise is seventy-two days; but in the Babylonian-Assyrian astrological texts, the period varies from one month to five months'. It was, no doubt, an important event in Babylonian thought when the old nature-gods were identified with various heavenly bodies, but it marked little religious advance. Jastrow may be justified in his observation that 'astrology is possibly the most innocent form of charlatanism in our modern life'; it is supposed to be some sort of commerce between the earth and the powers above, but, in so far as it is utilitarian rather than reverential, it falls outside the sphere of religion proper.

Scientific astronomy succeeded and undermined astrology in Babylonia; in Europe, as Jastrow points out, the process was reversed; for the Greeks of the classical period were mathematicians and of a scientific and observant spirit; it was only after they had to some extent charted the heavens and apprehended the courses of the stars as governed by immutable law that popular religion and even philosophic thought were concerned with astrology. But in this way a fundamental change has occurred in the presuppositions of astrology. In Babylonia it rested upon the capricious and changeable elements in nature, but now it assumes inexorable law which in its turn seems to point to inevitable fate. The Babylonian astrologers plied their skill primarily to ascertain whether this day or that

would be propitious for a birth, a battle or a journey; the philosophic astrologers of the later period sought rather to interpret the fates of man by the causal occurrences of immutable law as manifested in the skies. There is a grandeur about the latter conception which the former lacks; it is akin to the fatalism to which, as Islam has shown, the mind of man is prone. Its ultimate root may lie in man's fear and sense of impotence in the presence of vast powers beyond his control or understanding; but it is more rational than the superstition of the modern soldier that his life is safe till he meet the bullet 'with his number on it'; for human life is obviously affected and even to some extent determined by the sun that warms the earth and the moon that sways the tides. But it is still doubtful whether this set of beliefs and practices falls under the heading of 'religion', since a utilitarian reading of the future or interpretation of the present has no necessary connexion with reverence and awe, which mark that which is sacred.

#### NEOPLATONISM

It was the declared and single-minded intention of the British *raj* in India to be neutral in matters of religion. The policy was feasible in respect of the more philosophical religions but impossible in respect of the innumerable nature-cults and popular superstitions, for the British taught modern science in the schools, and the naïve belief in warring natural deities of wind and weather, in malignant or benevolent spirits, cannot for long coexist with scientific

knowledge. With the advance of knowledge, therefore, the religions of Nature are either abandoned or undergo a transformation. Of this latter a signal illustration comes from the early Christian centuries in Europe in the last attempt of paganism to stay the onslaught of the new religion. The treatise *Concerning the Gods and the Universe* by Sallustius was probably composed in the reign of Julian, 'the apostate' (A.D. 331-363). The author offers a rational explanation of myth, sacrifice and astrology; he argues that the universe itself must be both uncreated and imperishable; it is plainly a providential order and therefore rational:

' whence comes the order of the universe, if there is nothing that sets it in order? Why is it that everything comes into being for a purpose, as, for instance, irrational soul that there may be perception, rational soul that the earth may be adorned? Providence can be seen again from its application to our bodies. The eyes were made transparent that we might see, the nose put over the mouth that we might distinguish evil-smelling food; of the teeth those in front are sharp, to cut the food, those within flat, to grind it. In this way we see that every detail in every part is in accordance with reason.'<sup>34</sup>

The agents or instruments of Providence are the gods, some of them causing the world to exist, others animating it, others harmonizing, others guarding it. The good and the wise amongst men, when freed by death from the encumbrance of the body, may hope to share the life of the gods in the government of the universe. But these gods are themselves part of nature. It is necessary that the mind of man ascend beyond nature to the First

and Universal Cause which surpasses all things in power and goodness, 'for which reason all things must partake of it'. This First Cause must be conceived as Goodness even more than as Being.<sup>35</sup>

We see here in embryonic form the argument later to be drawn out so majestically by St. Thomas Aquinas, that man may ascend in thought from the world to the transcendent and recognize beyond Nature its source which is at once Being and Goodness. Here the worship of Nature passes beyond itself to the austere and distant worship of 'God'. But in so far as this approach remains in the sphere of argument and is not touched to life by some more direct apprehension of the divine and the eternal, it belongs rather to philosophy than to religion.

We find the same idea, but in how much warmer a setting, how much more religious a form, in the teaching of the Platonist, Maximus of Tyre, who taught in Rome in the second century of our era.

'In the midst of this great conflict and clash and discord [he said] you may discern one law, one confession prevalent everywhere in unison all over the earth—that there is one God, the King and Father of all, and many gods, the children of God, fellow-rulers with God. This the Greek alike declares and the barbarian, the dweller inland and the dweller on the sea, the wise and the unwise. . . . What are all these things of proportion and beauty, seasons and variations, temperature of the air, teeming of animals, fruitful growths? The Soul answers: They are all the works of God; they yearn after the Artist who made them; they have a dim sense of the art. The whole indeed you will not see till He calls you to Himself; and call you He will at no distant date. Wait for His call. Old age will come to you—the guide thither—

and Death, about whom the coward laments, whose approach sets him trembling, but the lover of God bids Death welcome, and has good courage when he sees him come. But if, even in the present time, you crave to learn God's nature, how should one declare it? . . . Conceive in your thought, I would say, something which is not material size nor colour nor shape nor any other mode undergone by matter; rather as if a beautiful body were hidden from view by many variegated garments, and a lover unclothed it, in order to take clear knowledge of it: just in such wise do you strip away in your mind this covering and the activity of the eyes, and you will see what remains—that Object itself as you yearn to behold it. But if your infirmity forbids you the vision of Him, the Father and Maker, it suffices for you at the present time that you behold His works, that you do homage to His multitudinous and manifold children. . . . Behold an hierarchy and ordered system of rule going down from God to the earth.<sup>36</sup>

Here beyond all question is religion; it may be called a religion of Nature both in the sense that it is closely connected with the contemplation of the natural world, and in the sense that it offers no 'revealed' dogmas. But here is an apprehension of the divine beyond that which may be derived by logical argument from the contemplation of natural processes. It is not a religion of Nature, but a religion through and beyond Nature. It comes to its finest expression in a passage that may as properly be called Platonic as Christian in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, where he tells of his conversation with his mother shortly before her death. It marks not the argument from the world of Nature to the transcendence and existence of God, the realm of metaphysics, so much as the ascent of the soul through the transient to the eternal, to

God through Nature, which is the realm of religion. St. Augustine spoke with his mother of the life to come:

' and as our converse drew to this conclusion, that the sweetest conceivable delight of sense in the brightest conceivable earthly sunshine was not to be compared, no, nor even named with the happiness of that life, we soared with glowing hearts towards the Same, mounting step by step the ladder of the material order, through heaven itself, whence sun and moon and stars shed their radiance upon earth. And still higher did we climb by the staircase of the spirit, thinking and speaking of Thee, and marvelling at Thy works. And so we came to our own minds, and passed beyond them into the region of unfailing plenty, where Thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of truth, where Life is Wisdom by which all these things come to be, both the things that have been and the things that shall be; and the Life itself never comes to be, but is, as it was and shall be evermore, because in it is neither past nor future but present only, for it is eternal; for past and future are not eternal. And as we talked and yearned after it, we touched it for an instant with the whole force of our hearts.' <sup>37</sup>

The very varied types of religion considered in this chapter are alike in this, that all are derived, at least in large part, from the contemplation of the natural world regarded as a whole, a universe. The belief in gods of storm and sky, of water and vegetation, marks early thought amongst most peoples; it is transcended in various ways. Some thinkers ascend by logic to the conception of a First Cause, recognizing a pattern, a purpose, an expression of Reason in the whole, yet remaining agnostic before its mystery. Others, resting more upon the intimations of goodness and beauty in the

universe, achieve a more positive content for their conception of the Being who is apprehended as the Artificer and even Lover of all. It would seem, however, that this type of religion does not attain its full dignity and splendour of conception till the philosophy derived from the contemplation of Nature is elevated and quickened by that sense of 'God' which, as we have seen, finds veiled expression in all ages and all parts of the world. Here it is not profitable to speak of some religions as false in distinction from others or another deemed to be true nor even to contrast the Christian faith with paganism. This part of the subject of religion aptly illustrates Dr. C. C. J. Webb's observation: 'I would see in the religious experiences of mankind as a whole a genuine unity, and would consider it as the response of the human spirit to a Divine Spirit with which it is by the necessity of its nature in perpetual contact.'<sup>38</sup>

#### CHAPTER IV

### THE MOST HIGH GOD

ALMOST all peoples, even the most primitive, have an apprehension however dim, which may conveniently be called a sense of 'God'. This, as has already been indicated, comprises substantially the whole of the religion of the pygmies, but perhaps nowhere else do we find this type of religion pure and without admixture of other elements. In the foregoing chapter it was suggested that the religion of Nature in its higher phases only seems to catch fire and become entirely religious when it is kindled by a sense of God to which the natural order may minister but which cannot be directly derived from it. Those religious conceptions which fall under this chapter for consideration as the worship of the Most High God, and are in a very notable degree spiritual and ethical and remote from all cults of Nature, are yet for the most part associated with Nature and particularly with the sky.

Thus it would appear that the supreme god of the Aryan peoples before their division was Dyaus, the sky-god. In the early Vedic period in India the leading place is taken by Varuna (the Greek *Ouranos* or Sky). He is 'king', the god of the firmament and particularly of the starry sky; he is Creator, Designer, Ruler of the universe; he is exalted above all impurity; in his wrath he punishes the wicked; in his grace he has pity on the peni-

tent. He is God. Around Varuna stand the mysterious deities called the Adityas; there are no myths about them drawn from Nature; as guardians of the holy ordinances of the universe and of mankind they keep watch day and night. Thus Mitra is warden of troth, of friendship and of covenants. These beings are less gods than personified functions of the ultimate divine Being.

#### ZOROASTER

This type of religion reached its finest flower, its greatest moral depth and prophetic insight, if we except the Christian Scriptures, in the religious reform of Zoroaster, who, though his followers were mostly drawn from a single class, professed, perhaps for the first time in history, a religion that in principle is universal. Zoroaster is generally supposed to have lived in the seventh century before Christ, but his date may have been much earlier. He lived and taught in the east of Iran. For ten years he had but one disciple, a cousin. At last he converted a local prince, Vishtaspa. The prophet himself was possibly killed in one of the many wars against unbelievers. His religion was closely associated with economic and social reforms; he was the champion of the agriculturist against the nomad; his religion is both spiritually exalted and a peasant piety. It is to be contrasted almost as much with the debased 'Mazdaism' which followed it as with the Nature-religion which, as Herodotus indicates, preceded it. First, in distinction from the later religion of the Persians, we do not find in the *Gathas*, the authentic work of

Zoroaster, magic or the worship of Mithras or the sacrifice of the intoxicating drink (*haoma*) or the cult of the dead. Zoroaster addresses God as *Ahura Mazdah*, the Wise Lord, but this in the *Gathas* is still a description, not a name. The Wise Lord is Creator; he knows all things, even the sins of men; he is sovereign over all. Pre-eminently the Wise Lord is the righteous God of Truth, the hater and the vanquisher of the Lie.

‘ This I ask thee, tell me truly, Ahura. Who is by generation the Father of Right, at the first? Who determined the path of sun and stars? Who is it by whom the moon waxes and wanes again? This, O Mazdah, and yet more I am fain to know. This I ask thee, tell me truly, Ahura. Who upheld the earth beneath and the firmament from falling? Who the waters and the plants? Who yoked swiftness to winds and clouds? Who is, O Mazdah, creator of Good Thought? This I ask thee, tell me truly Ahura. What artist made light and darkness? What artist made sleep and waking? Who made morning, noon, and night, that call the understanding man to his duty? This I ask thee, tell me truly, Ahura—whether what I shall proclaim is verily the truth. Will Right with its actions give aid (at the last)? will Piety? Will Good Thought announce from thee the Dominion? For whom hast thou made the pregnant cow that brings good luck? This I ask thee, tell me truly, Ahura. Who created together with Dominion the precious Piety? Who made by wisdom the son obedient to his father? I strive to recognize by these things thee, O Mazdah, creator of all things through the holy spirit.’<sup>1</sup>

God is known through Nature as its Creator and in the heart of man as the eternal Lord of Righteousness. The *Gathas* of Zoroaster have no real parallel in literature except in the writings of the Hebrew Prophets and Psalmists.

The religion of Zoroaster was a way of life as well as a doctrine of God. It is thus summarized by Carnoy:

‘ By his right choice the man who obeys the Law helps in the final victory of the Good Spirit, the Spirit of the Wise Lord over the Spirit of Deceit and Treachery. Inspired by a Right Mind he takes his stand against the whole world of the *druj* (the Lie), its satellites, its priests, its sorcerers and fairies and its cult (sacrifices of living creatures and of the intoxicating drink). He repudiates with special emphasis nomadic life with brigandage and strife, the life of infidels and Turks. He leads with Wisdom of Purpose an orderly existence according to Law, in Obedience to the Good Spirit represented by an Adviser. In this way he will realize in this world and hereafter “ the wished for Kingdom ”, the Kingdom of Blessings, the Kingdom of the Best, the Good Reward with Perfect Happiness and Immortality that will follow the Last Ordeal and the Renovation of the World.’<sup>2</sup>

The Amshaspands (or Amesha Çepentas) that surround the Wise Lord correspond with the Adityas about Varuna; they are Good Thought, Right Order, the Excellent Kingdom, the Holy Character, Health, and Immortality. These figures, which in the *Gathas* are never shaped into a theological hexad nor clearly distinguished from other good spirits, are not distinct from the Wise Lord nor even subordinate to him; they are rather his attributes or powers ‘ endowed ’, as Moulton says, ‘ with a vague measure of separate existence for the purpose of bringing out the truth for which they severally stand ’. Thus Vohu Manah, ‘ Good Thought ’, may equally well be called ‘ Thy Thought ’. Not elsewhere in the story of religion do we find in purer form the worship of God as

the All-wise, the All-good, the Creator, the Lord of Righteousness and Truth. In no sense is the doctrine derived from the contemplation of Nature. Its basis will be said by some to be fanaticism, by others revelation.

#### IKHNATON

Zoroaster of Iran, whose date is uncertain, and Amenhotep IV, who came to the throne of Egypt about 1375 B.C., emerge from their fellows like the two colossi which gaze toward the sunrise from the plain of Egyptian Thebes. Different as they are, they stand alone without predecessors and without direct successors, founders of religions too high for the generality of men, worshippers of the one and only God, the Lord of Life, the Creator of all things visible and invisible.

From time immemorial the sun had been the great god in Egypt. With political unification and expansion the sphere of the sun-god was naturally extended, and the spread of the imperial power of Egypt over large parts of Asia and Africa pointed the way to a universal sun-religion. It is important to notice that the type of monotheism proclaimed by Amenhotep was not unrelated to the religious and political background of his time. It is pre-eminently a monotheism of the sun and might as such well have fallen for consideration in the foregoing chapter except that Amenhotep like Spinoza has been called 'a God-intoxicated man', and his religion involved the violent repudiation of all the manifold nature-cults of the prevailing Egyptian religion. For the religion of Egypt, in

spite of tendencies towards mysticism or pantheism in isolated thinkers, never quite won clear of primitive animism and fetishism. The stars, the earth, the Nile, pre-eminently the sun, were gods; gods and demons were supposed to dwell in animals; trees, men, and buildings were deified; the world of the dead was held to be inhabited by innumerable gods and demons of human or animal form. All this faith, with all the magic connected with the after-world, was swept away by the young reforming Pharaoh. The Sun-god was to be called Aton in future; he is the one and only God; 'while thou wert alone' is constantly said of him; a new symbol was ascribed to him, a disk with rays emanating from it, and hands at the end of these; the king himself took a new name, Ikhnaton; the plural for 'gods' was erased from the old monuments. This was beyond all question an ethical monotheism, but, whereas the monotheism of Zoroaster was first and last ethical, the religion of Ikhnaton was pre-eminently a worship of light, of beauty and, in some degree, of love. God is the Creator of all things, the Light and the Joy of all; he made all nations, set them in their place, supplies their needs, giving them their various tongues; for Egypt he made the Nile to come out of the nether earth; for the other nations he created a Nile in the heavens to water their lands; 'thou art the father and mother of all that thou hast made'.

The reformation of Ikhnaton passed away within a few years of his death leaving hardly a trace except a few hymns, which, however, convey the sublime exaltation of this religion:

' How fair thou appearest in the Light-mountain of heaven, thou living Sun, Aton, Beginning of life! Thou art arisen in the eastern Light-mountain and hast filled all lands with thy beauty. Thou art fair and great, glittering and high above all lands. Thy beams encompass the lands to the uttermost end of all that thou hast made. . . . Thou causest the fruit to be formed in women; thou createst the seed in men; thou holdest the child in life in the womb of his mother; thou soothest him that his tears cease, thou nurse of the infant in the mother's womb! Thou art he that giveth breath to preserve each of thy creatures in life; when it issues from its mother's womb to breathe on the day of its birth, thou openest its mouth that it may speak and carest for its needs. The little bird in the egg chirps in its stone chamber. . . . In its time it comes forth from the egg to chirp; it walks upon its feet, as soon as it comes forth. How manifold, then, are thy works, thou only God, beside whom there is none other! Thou and thou alone hast made the earth according to thy heart's desire, with men and cattle and all other living creatures, all that is upon the earth that goes upon its feet, all that is aloft that flies with wings, the mountain-lands of Syria and Nubia, the flat land of Egypt. Thou settest men in their place; thou carest for their needs; each one hath his food; his life's course is reckoned. The tongues of men are different in speech, their form alike; their skin is various, for thus hast thou separated the peoples. Thou makest the Nile in the underworld, thou fetchest it according to thy good pleasure to preserve in life the people of Egypt. . . . Thou Lord of all lands who risest for them, thou Son of the Day, great in majesty, thou carest for the sustenance of all the mountain-lands afar; thou gavest a Nile in heaven. . . . How beneficent are all thy purposes, thou Lord of Eternity. . . . Thou art in my heart; there is none other that knew thee save thy son Nefer-khepru-re, Wan-re (Ikhnaton).'<sup>3</sup>

Ikhnaton has a sense of all Nature evoked into being by God, held in being by him, illuminated

by his beauty and responding to him in a cosmic hymn of praise. Whence did he derive this magnificent conception? That it was not unrelated to the religious and political background of his time has been admitted: that it is closely connected with the observation of Nature is obvious; yet in its sublimity and religious exaltation it is plainly no mere deduction from Nature or, like the Chinese *Tao*, a transcript of the face of Nature. We are reminded rather of the words of St. Augustine, 'we touched it for an instant with the whole force of our hearts'. It is obvious that his apprehension cannot be proved by any formal logic, but, if genius is a proper term in the field of religion (which may well be doubted), it may be applied to Ikhnaton. This is what he saw. Did he see amiss?

The hymns of Ikhnaton have a parallel in parts of the Hebrew psalter—' thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing ', ' O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches ' ; but the religion of the Old Testament as a whole is too complex to fall under any one heading. One section of it, however, may be supposed to illustrate a sense of God, spiritual and untouched by conceptions drawn from the processes of Nature. The late Archbishop Söderblom, in particular, drew attention in this connexion to the patriarchal narratives of Israel before the time of Moses.<sup>4</sup> In later stories God is connected with Mount Horeb that burns with fire, or with the whirlwind, the volcano, the earthquake, but in these earlier narratives we look in vain for any

connexion between the divine Names and Nature. God is 'the God of thy fathers'; he is El 'Olam (Genesis xxi. 33), which may be translated 'God of Eternity'; he is El Shaddai (Genesis xlvi. 25), which the Septuagint translates 'the Almighty'; he is 'El Elyon, creator of heaven and earth'; 'El Elyon' is 'God Most High' (Genesis xiv. 19). In the absence, however, of complete agreement amongst scholars as to the significance of the terms, it would be unwise to lay much stress upon this. It is from the Christian religion that this sense of 'God' can best be illustrated.

#### ST. BONAVENTURA

It is, however, the view of some that the Christian religion, being based upon a unique and final revelation, cannot properly be set alongside or compared with non-Christian religions. This theological question cannot be discussed in this place. It must be stated simply without discussion that underlying this essay is the assumption that whatever is distinctive in Christianity rests upon historic facts unknown, ignored or otherwise interpreted by non-Christians. It will not be maintained that the term 'revelation' in connexion with Christianity bears a different meaning, though it may have a different content, from that which it bears in connexion with other religions.

In a famous chapter of his *Confessions* St. Augustine tells how in the writings of the Platonists he found in substance all that St. John asserts in the Prologue to his Gospel except only that 'the Word became flesh'.<sup>5</sup> When he became

a Christian, his theology remained Platonic in form. An outstanding Christian example of the type of religion considered in this chapter is to be seen in the writings of St. Augustine's great theological disciple, St. Bonaventura, not improperly known as 'the seraphic doctor', an outline of whose religious outlook is described in the little book which he wrote in A.D. 1259 upon that Mount Alverna where his master, St. Francis of Assisi, some years before had received the Stigmata. He was another 'God-intoxicated man', and there was the most intimate connexion between Nature and his apprehension of God, but, as he insists, the apprehension of God must precede the recognition of him in his works of creation:

'the human reason cannot reach a full and final explanation of created things unless it is aided by an understanding of the most pure, actual, complete and absolute Being, in other words, unless it reaches out to the utterly simple and eternal Being of God in whose mind are to be found the ultimate ground and reason of all things. How indeed could the human mind surmise that the particular things with which it comes in contact are defective and incomplete did it not possess some knowledge of a Being who is utterly devoid of imperfection?'

Moreover, it is idle for us to gaze upon the mirror of creation until first that mirror which is the mind is cleansed. 'All the created things of this material world around us', wrote St. Bonaventura, following St. Augustine as St. Augustine had followed Plato,

'lead the soul of the contemplative and the wise man to

the eternal God. The reason to be assigned for this is that sensible things in their totality are simply shadows, echoes, symbols, footprints, images and mirrors, signs divinely given and set before us for the beholding of God, their most powerful, wise and excellent First Principle, the eternal Source and Light and Fountain of all plenitude, of all art, Efficient, Exemplary and Intelligent Cause. These things, I say, are so many *exempla* or samples set before minds uncultured and immersed in the life of sense, so that from things seen they may pass to things invisible, as from so many signs to the things signified. The visible creatures of the material world point to, and signify, the invisible things of God. . . . so that those people who will not consider these things and come to behold and bless and love God in all things are inexcusable since they do not wish to pass from darkness to the wondrous light of God.'<sup>7</sup>

Zoroaster had apprehended God pre-eminently in his transcendent Righteousness and Truth, Ikhnaton in the external beneficence of the sun; St. Bonaventura, following the tradition started by Socrates, finds a greater manifestation of God in man than in all created Nature beside: 'in the visible world we behold his footprints; in our souls we discern his image'. And this in two ways: first, the soul's various activities of memory, intellect and will 'point to God: memory which is a reflexion of his eternity, intellect which postulates his truth, and the power of choice which leads to him as the Supreme Good'; second, by the nature of personality itself as a mirror of the threefold Being of God. Thus in the soul of man we find the mind, the idea which it begets, and the love which binds the mind and the idea, or, to put it in another way, memory, intellect and will, and

these even in man are 'consubstantial, coequal, coeval and mutually inclusive'.<sup>8</sup>

The Platonic piety of St. Bonaventura is to be clearly distinguished from the Stoic or Chinese religion based on a sense of the order of Nature, as well as from the Aristotelian approach of St. Thomas Aquinas, who would argue from indisputable premisses to the existence and the goodness of God, supplementing by truths of revelation that which is lacking in the insights given by reason. St. Bonaventura, rather, may be said to start from 'revelation', or a strengthening and fructifying of the natural reason by the divine light, or, from the human side, from faith or the sense of God which is given so mysteriously to men. The sense of God, not Nature or reason, is his starting-point, but, this granted, there is an ascent of the soul through every part and aspect of the natural order to the divine or transcendent order. Thus in the first stage, as he says,

'the soul was led to God by going out to external things to admire in them the work of God's creative power. Then, looking at creation, the soul beheld God's footprints upon the world's surface: the material world became a mirror in which it beheld its God. Next, turning its attention inwards to itself, the soul began to reach God from a consideration of itself as God's created image, and then a further step was made when it began to behold God in the mirror of its renovated being. Whereupon the soul was led to raise its gaze above and beyond itself, seeking, as it were, the light of God's countenance and rejoicing in its own progress. But no rest was possible until it found God in his own reflected light, for all this progress was achieved in a degree suitable for those who are still pilgrims on the way to God and who must

depend upon their own efforts to scale the heights of contemplation. But when the soul shall have reached the sixth step and begun to contemplate the First and Highest Principle of all and Jesus Christ, the Mediator of God and man, then it shall have contact with spiritual things so sublime that any comparison with created things becomes impossible, and so deeply mysterious that all intellectual keenness is unavailing.'<sup>9</sup>

#### SPINOZA

If no cult or piety is strictly religious unless it be touched by this sense of God, it is but rarely that we find the sense of God to be the beginning and end of religion. One reason for this may be indicated by Farnell in his assertion that 'Judaism and Islam are the only world-religions that have been able to keep out the goddess; and therefore they are the only religions that have been able to maintain themselves as pure monotheisms'. Islam, though there rests upon it something of the awe and splendour of the spaces and silences of the Arabian desert, is a religion of the Will rather than of the Being of God, but Judaism, where it is emancipated from a traditional legalism, or surges up as in the piety of the Hasidim, may well illustrate the type of religion considered in this chapter.

In this connexion we may consider the ex-communicated Jew, Spinoza, of Amsterdam, who was born in A.D. 1634 and died at the age of forty-three. He founded no sect; his philosophy on its formal side might appear arid even beyond the wont of metaphysicians; he has been called 'a saint of rationalism'; yet such diverse poets as Goethe and Coleridge, Shelley and Wordsworth

found his teaching deeply congenial to them, and the universality of his thought is attested in the saying that 'every philosopher has two philosophies, his own and Spinoza's'. By the consent of his opponents no less than of his friends Spinoza lived a blameless, saintly life, nor can there be any doubt but that his philosophy, abstruse, enigmatic and strictly rational as it is, must be accounted the attempt to give intellectual expression to his profound and all-embracing religion.

His philosophy is first and last a way of life. He gives some hint of his motives and inspiration in the opening sections of his *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*; the very title of the book suggests St. Bonaventura's adage that the mirror of the mind must first be cleansed before the mirror of creation can be truly seen, and indeed Spinoza stands clearly in the Neoplatonic tradition as it came to him through the medieval Jewish Platonist philosophers. This strictly logical treatise 'On the Improvement of the Understanding' begins almost like the *Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian flees in fear from the City of Destruction.

'I saw', says Spinoza, 'that I stood in extreme peril and that I was compelled with all my strength to seek a remedy, however uncertain, as a sick man in the grip of a mortal disease foreseeing inevitable death unless a remedy be applied is compelled to search with all his strength for that remedy however uncertain it be, for every hope he has is placed therein.'

He had found moreover that 'all those things which are popularly pursued', such as pleasure, wealth or fame, 'not only confer no remedy for

the conservation of our being but even hinder it and are often the very cause of the destruction of those who possess them and are invariably the cause of the destruction of those who are possessed by them'. He came to see that there could be no satisfaction in any of 'the things which can perish'; it is 'love for a thing eternal and infinite' which alone can 'pasture the mind' with joy; such a thing alone is 'free of every sadness', wherefore it is 'greatly to be desired and to be sought with all our powers'. But, he goes on, 'it was not without good cause that I used these words, if only I could go to the root of the matter'; for 'although I perceived this clearly enough with my mind, yet that did not enable me to lay aside all avarice, sensual enjoyment and personal ambition'. Only gradually did he come to a settled peace and a more or less continuous enjoyment of man's felicity which consists in 'the knowledge of the union which the mind has with the whole of Nature' or, in religious terms, in the enjoyment of union with God; for God and Nature are interchangeable terms in the philosophy of Spinoza.

By Nature he does not mean that which is perishable in the world of sense, but rather the idea or law which lies beyond the perishable; nor by God does he mean simply the immanent Principle that runs through all things; God is transcendent as well as immanent; he is *natura naturans* as well as *natura naturata*. Substance, he taught, is that which is self-dependent or subsisting in itself and by itself. There is and can be only one substance which may be called Reality or Nature or God. All

predications are predications about God; everything else is 'adjectival' in its nature. Existence pertains to God alone; he is the cause of all things coming into existence and of their remaining in existence; 'I hold God to be the immanent cause of all things. . . . I affirm with Paul that all things are in God and move in God';<sup>10</sup> whatever is in God; God may be called the Whole of which all things are parts; everything that is is real and therefore belongs in some sense to God.<sup>11</sup> Extension as well as Thought is to be ascribed to God, yet this is not to be understood as material spatiality. Individual things are simply modifications of the attributes of God or modes by which the attributes of God are expressed in a fixed and definite manner. Nothing in the universe is contingent, for God's power is identical with his essence, and whatever is in the power, that is, in the essence, of God necessarily exists. Everything is what it is as a necessary consequence of the 'order of the universe' or the 'laws of nature'. The universe is not to be interpreted in terms of purpose which would involve duration; it is to be seen by the wise man *sub specie aeternitatis*; the only true understanding of it 'is that which begins and ends with the idea of God or Reality'.<sup>12</sup>

Such a brief statement will seem arid, remote, abstract, far from the warmth and vision of religion, but Spinoza, following a thought of Aristotle, maintains that the mind in truly thinking or knowing is one with the object of its knowledge. Moreover that which is true is true independently of time; thus by right thought man is at one with God.

Yet, as de Burgh says, 'there is no thought here of Pantheistic absorption; in the experience of union with God a man realizes his full individuality. In that experience he is, and knows himself to be, eternal; not everlasting or immortal, for eternity excludes any thought of temporal duration'. In the intellectual love of God is man's 'felicity'.<sup>13</sup>

Spinoza will not speak of God as personal, for that would seem an anthropomorphism, but God loves us, and we may love him; the 'infinite idea of God' is no less the infinite love than the infinite intelligence of God. But Spinoza could on occasion speak a simpler, more directly religious, language. He repudiated the doctrine of the Incarnation as it is taught in the Christian Church, but he writes,

'It is not, as I believe, absolutely necessary to salvation to "know Christ according to the flesh": but it is necessary to know the eternal Son of God, i.e. God's eternal wisdom, which has manifested itself in all things, especially in the human mind, and most of all in Jesus Christ. For this wisdom alone teaches what is true and false, good and bad: without it, therefore, no one can attain to the "state of blessedness".'<sup>14</sup>

And again:

'Justice and charity are the one and most sure sign of the true catholic faith and the fruit of the true Holy Spirit: and wherever these are found, there is Christ truly and wherever these are wanting is Christ wanting, for only by the Spirit of Christ can we be led to a love of justice and charity.'<sup>15</sup>

'Beatitude', he said in a famous passage, 'is not the reward of virtue but is virtue itself. It is nothing else than a very acquiescence of the mind arising

from an intuitive knowledge of God'. As our minds rest in God and cease to be under the dominion of external things, as we accept suffering and sorrow as of God's timeless decree, as we see all things in relation to God, we are at peace, we belong to the eternal world, we have arrived at the true home of our spirits. When Spinoza speaks of God, writes Joachim, we 'must not understand by it the God of any religious sect whatever'. That is true, but perhaps with equal truth we might say that, when Spinoza speaks of God, we must understand that same God who is worshipped and has been worshipped by every truly religious sect since the world began.

This chapter has brought together Zoroaster and Ikhnaton, St. Bonaventura and Spinoza, four great teachers immeasurably unlike, yet one in their absorbing thought of God, their burning love for God. *Non uno itinere perveniri potest ad tam grande secretum*—or, as the apostle might put it, we can only apprehend *with all saints* what is the breadth and length and depth and height of that infinite secret which is yet an open secret.

#### NATURAL THEOLOGY

Between primitive man's vague sense of a Supreme Being on the one hand, and, on the other, such consuming sense of God as is evinced in these outstanding figures hitherto considered in this chapter, stands a mode of piety so widespread amongst persons of some civilization as almost to deserve the title of 'the religion of all good men'. Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), one of the

first scientific writers upon religion, put together as the substance of religion certain common notions which, as he supposed, were universally believed. He found five such principles: the existence of God, the duty of worshipping him, moral virtue or the right use of our faculties as the chief part of his worship, the expiation of offences through penitence, rewards of virtue and vice in this world and in a life to come. It is not the case that these principles are taught in every form of religion, but it has often been maintained that they ought to be accepted by all men, whatever else they believe, since they are the dictates of man's natural reason, and it would appear that, in fact, numberless good and humble men of all ages and all varieties of religious profession have lived by these principles and made them the basis of their practical religion. This type of religion is ethical, rational, sober, little concerned with ceremonial, with speculation or with myth. It is the religion of God and Duty. It affords the philosophy of Kant and of the Deists; it finds literary expression in the Wisdom literature of the ancient world; it is the presupposition of the humanism of Shakespeare and of the European classical tradition. It speaks a universal language intelligible to all religious men in every age. Estlin Carpenter quotes a prayer to the 'World-animating Spirit' from Peru in the sixteenth century:

'O Pachacamac, thou who hast existed from the beginning, and shalt exist unto the end, who createst man by saying, "Let man be", who defendest us from evil, and preservest our life and health, art thou in the sky or in

the earth, in the clouds or in the depths? Hear the voice of him who implores thee, and grant him his petitions. Give us life everlasting; preserve us, and accept this our sacrifice.'<sup>16</sup>

'What doth the Lord require of thee,' said the Hebrew prophet, 'but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?' (Micah vi. 8). The Greek tragedians or Plato will speak sometimes of the gods and sometimes of God simply. In such passages, where, it may be noted, they are apt to recall a conception of Zeus that goes back beyond history and at the same time to express their profoundest intuition, they speak a language all can understand. It has been discovered in the last century and a half that the sayings of Jesus Christ appeal directly to the heart, and therefore answer to the dim intimations, of men of all stages of culture and all varieties of race and outlook, in Asia and Africa, in Europe, America and Polynesia. If it is important to analyse the extraordinary differences of religious outlook through man's history, it is not less important for the philosophy of religion to observe an equally remarkable agreement amongst those who by general consent are among the spiritual teachers of mankind. Charles Doughty thus expressed it:

The lips of many have spoken the words of Life.  
 In this, at least, the best agree in one,  
 That in well-doing and righteous human life  
 Sure pathway lies unto immortal Gods.  
 In all the haps and changes of the Time  
 And of their World, which those have sought to  
 purge,  
 Man's Reason is his lamp and only guide.

Not uniform is that Reason of a man;  
But warped with every variance of the World,  
His time, place, partiality and his brief years.

‘God is the great Parent of your real self. Faith is just like filial obedience to your parents. With God there is neither day nor night, neither far nor near. Pray to him straightforwardly and with a heart of faith. God has no voice, and his form is unseen. If you start to doubt, then doubt has no end. Free yourself from fearful doubt. Do not worry but believe in God. The believer should have a faith which makes him a friend of God. He should not have a faith which makes him afraid of God. Come near to God.’<sup>17</sup> Could any student of religion coming upon this passage without a context ascribe it with any kind of confidence to any particular century or to any particular religion? It is said to come from a Shinto sect, wholly uninfluenced by Christianity, in the mid-nineteenth century. What a phantasmagoria is presented to our vision when we contemplate the religious rites and notions of mankind! Yet at a certain level Plato answers to Zoroaster, and Calvin to Confucius across the centuries, and at the point of their agreement they are congruous alike with the Ten Commandments and the prayers of primitive man addressed to the Supreme Being whom he dimly knows.

## CHAPTER V

### THE WAY OF PERSONAL DEVOTION

IT was observed above that the distinction between a god and a demonic spirit lies in this, that with a god one may enter into personal relations. A type of deep and inspiring piety, taking many different forms in the story of religion, is personal devotion to a personal god. Such a form of religion is consistent with theoretical polytheism and is compatible in practice with many ideas with which logically it would seem to be at variance. Rarely is man's religion controlled by logic.

#### MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

Classical Buddhism, as we have seen, is an atheist philosophy or psychology denying the reality of personality; in particular, the conception of the Buddha, as Oldenberg says, might drop out of Buddhism without materially affecting Buddhist doctrine. But classical Buddhism is not the Buddhism of the masses; it is doubtful how far it is even the Buddhism of the time of Buddha. From the earliest days, it would seem, there were laymen who took refuge in 'the Buddha, the doctrine and the congregation', and the monks will not have been slow to offer heavenly rewards to the laity who ministered to their physical needs. The Pali canon is not a safe guide to the origins of Buddhism.

'If we reason *a priori*', writes A. B. Keith, 'and lay aside our natural desire to modernize and to find reason prevailing in a barbarous age, we should rather expect to find that the Buddha was one who was indeed human, but who at the same time felt himself to be, and was regarded by his followers as, something far superior to humanity, a great divinity in the eyes of his followers, a deity even to those who were not of the chosen circle.'<sup>1</sup>

This presupposition is borne out by the evidence. Buddha, he says, 'in fact neither has the appearance of a man, nor will he admit that he is a man. . . . The evidence might be accumulated, but it is sufficient to remark that there is nothing to set against it.' It is to be noticed, for instance, that the fire-worshippers were among his early followers, nor may it be supposed that of a sudden they abandoned their living religion for the chill rationalism of classical Buddhism. It is possible, but not very probable, that the Buddha had divinity thrust upon him; it seems more likely that from the first he came before men as a personal Saviour, a being not of this common earth.

The Buddhism of the books, then, is a passionless rationalism, scornful of popular superstition, sceptical of the supernatural, and bound up with a self-regarding ethic aimed to achieve deliverance from the miseries of existence, the *Nirvana* it promises being not easily distinguishable from cessation of being. Such a faith lingers in Ceylon, but elsewhere, as in Tibet, China and Japan, Buddhism is a religion of personal immortality, faith in a divine helper, an altruistic ethic, theism, prayer and grace; polytheism and magic enter into this faith; beside the Buddha stand many

Bodhisattvas, incarnations and heavenly helpers, who have renounced for the time their own bliss that they may aid struggling mortals. Not only is the Buddha regarded as divine, but also by him is Maya, the queen-mother-goddess or the Goddess of Mercy; purgatory and heaven take the place of the bloodless Nirvana. The great spread and development of this vivid and popular Buddhism took place in the second century A.D. under Nagarjuna, who was, perhaps, after Buddha himself the most outstanding Buddhist teacher.

Buddhism is divided into many sects at various removes from the classical formulations. One of these sects was introduced into China in A.D. 520. To its promoter the emperor said:

‘We have built temples, multiplied the Scriptures, encouraged many to join the order; is there not much merit in all this?’

‘None,’ he replied.

‘But what say the holy books? Do they not promise rewards for such deeds?’

‘There is nothing holy.’

‘But you yourself, are you not one of the holy ones?’

‘I do not know.’

‘Who are you?’

‘I do not know.’<sup>2</sup>

After this intimidating introduction, we are told, ‘the great man proceeded to open his missionary labours by sitting down opposite a wall and gazing at it for the next nine years’.

A very different sect, on the other hand, teaches that anyone, regardless of the life he has lived, may enter into ‘the Western Paradise’ by repeating the name of the Goddess of Mercy. Another

sect finds salvation in union with the universal Spirit which is Buddha:

The golden light upon the sunkist peaks,  
The water murmuring in the pebbly creeks,  
Are Buddha. In the stillness, hark, he speaks.<sup>3</sup>

Yet another sect, reminiscent of the Quaker's Inner Light as is the foregoing of Wordsworth's philosophy, holds that the Buddha loves all men, that there is something of the Buddha in all, and that salvation consists in the full realization of the indwelling Buddha.

But in popular Buddhism generally the Buddha is, in effect, the Saviour-god. To his glory hymns are addressed:

'Cleave ye to the Wise One, the Lion of the family of Sankya, even to him that is illumined by knowledge, the Light-bringer, who has destroyed the darkness, who shines forth gloriously, whose splendour is clear and pure, whose body is at rest, whose spirit is clear and peaceful. Trust yourself to the Lord of the wise, the Ocean of knowledge, the Lord of the Doctrine, the All-knowing, the God over all gods, to be reverenced by men and gods, even him whose rule is over the Doctrine, the Self-originated, who has brought under his power the scarce controllable mind, who has emancipated his spirit from the snares of Mara (Satan), whose eye and ear are not to be bound to this world, who brings suffering to an end, who has fully attained peace and freedom. Draw nigh to him, all, with devotion (*bhakti*), the Buddha of immeasurable insight (*buddhi*), who has become Light, whose Doctrine is incomparable, who dispels the darkness, who understands how to lead aright, whose deeds have come to rest. He is the king of Physicians, who dispenses the medicine of immortality; he is the hero among the disputants who presses hard the heretics; he is the

Friend of the Doctrine who knows the highest truth; he is the Leader who shows the way to the All-highest.'<sup>4</sup>

Through these repetitive and somewhat stilted phrases there gleams the sense of a divine Being, a Saviour, in whose teaching and guidance man finds deliverance from darkness and despair, from the fitful and transient, one who in his spiritual attainment, his wisdom and goodness, claims and deserves the homage of mankind. Light and Truth (or Doctrine) are here recurrent *motifs*, as in the Fourth Gospel. Buddhism like Christianity is a religion of salvation through faith in a personal Saviour. The relationship of the believer to the Buddha or the goddess of Mercy often corresponds, at least verbally, to that of the Christian to Christ or to his Mother. The parallel goes far. As Söderblom points out, the saving historic fact is, in general, distinctive of Biblical religion. In Mahayana Buddhism alone we find a parallel; for the Buddha has been called '*un dieu à biographie*', and salvation rests upon faith in the supposed historic vow of the Buddha to bring the light to his fellows before he himself would enter bliss. Thus the love, the sacrifice and pre-eminently the promise of the Buddha are the basis of personal faith and personal salvation.

It is by no accident that St. Francis Xavier and early Jesuit missionaries, finding in Japan the cult of the Buddhist goddess of Mercy, declared that the country was given over to the Lutheran heresy! Others have made the same comparison. Amidism, the cult of Amitabha, conceived as a Bodhisatva

of incomparable merit, rests salvation simply upon faith in him. It is strictly parallel to the Lutheran doctrine of *sola fide*. So within the Indian *bhakti*-religion there appear to be two schools of thought, the one named after the cat, the other after the monkey: the little monkey holds on to its mother and thus co-operates with her; the kitten, on the other hand, remains wholly passive in its mother's mouth leaving everything to her!

#### INDIAN BHAKTI

The religion of India is a vast amalgam of faiths, cults, mysticisms and philosophies. At the top is a highly abstract and impersonal philosophy removed from any sense of a living God; at the base is animism and the fear of demons; between as the popular religion are many theistic cults with bewildering and chaotic mythologies. Gradually two gods in particular emerge pre-eminent, each taken by his followers to be supreme. Vishnu originally had a particularly close connexion with the sacrificial system, but he came to be especially the god who could manifest himself in various *avatara*s or incarnations, though by no means necessarily human incarnations; thus he appears as Swan or Tortoise or Fish or Boar. Regarded as the god of many forms he could easily assume into himself the person and function of various non-Aryan gods. None the less Vishnu remained a great god; in his supreme majesty he is reminiscent of the Varuna of the Vedas, and increasingly he became the god who evoked love and who could be approached

with devotion. His nature and functions have been thus described:

‘ Nature is the scene of his sovereignty; there he reigns as King of kings; foremost in the universe, there is no higher Being in the three worlds. Hymn after hymn celebrates his unceasing activity. The mighty frame of earth and heaven constitutes his body; the sky is his head, the sun and moon his eyes, the winds his breaths. Without beginning and without end, an infinite eternal energy, he pervades all worlds, the unchanging fountain of all power, so that the whole creation springs from him and disappears in him. He is the Infinite Self, Teacher of the heavenly powers, the Unmanifest Spirit of all matter, Soul of the universe, with the All for his Form. . . . From creation to dissolution, from the darkness of primeval matter back to the Undeveloped once more shrouded in gloom, the mighty rhythm obeys his changeless sway. And Vishnu . . . is God with a character, Source of all Morality, Revealer of all Truth. Not only is he the divine Author of the Vedas, the Instructor in all sciences, the Master in all learning, he is the supreme Providence, Ordainer of ordainers, “ he who does good to everyone ” ’<sup>8</sup>

The second great god of popular religion is Shiva. If Vishnu may be said to stand, in some sense, for love and spirituality, Shiva may be said, subject to many qualifications, to stand for terror and sensuality. Thus Shiva-Rudra is the god of destruction, who destroys the world at the end of each world-period. But he is also the lord and protector of those who are feared by men or who live outside the conventions of men; he is worshipped accordingly by thieves and robbers, by wandering singers and dancers; he is the patron of the stage, the great actor and dancer and is often depicted as dancing the cosmic dance. It is

logically surprising, but psychologically intelligible, that the god with whom the most lascivious rites are usually associated, whose symbol is the *phallus*, should also be the great ascetic, the patron of those who seek the vision of Omnipotence through ecstasy and trance. Terror and fascination lie close together. Shiva, for all the terror associated with him, is yet the gracious god, who bringing sickness and death can also deliver from them. With Shiva is associated his wife, called by many names, of which the dreadful Kali is perhaps the most famous.

If God in the ancient *Upanishads* is, for the most part, impersonally conceived, there are passages and hints of another approach. Thus the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* ends:

To him who has the highest devotion [*bhakti*] for God,  
And for his spiritual teacher even as for God,  
To him these matters which have been declared  
Become manifest if he be a great soul.

This term, *bhakti*, connoting faith, reverence, adoration, rapturous devotion, is correlative to a personal god. As early as the second century B.C. we know of a sect of Shiva-worshippers called Bhagavatas or devotees, but it was not till about A.D. 1100 that, usually in connexion with the god Vishnu, there is developed *bhakti-marga*, the way of devotion as distinct from the way of knowledge or the way of works as a means to salvation. This worship is generally fixed upon some historical or epico-historical person deemed to be an incarnation of Vishnu.

The path of salvation by unmerited divine grace

flowers in the *Bhagavadgita*, the 'Song of the Blessed', with Krishna for its hero. Not all the stories there narrated of Krishna are edifying, and the cult of Krishna is not always pure. The *Bhagavadgita* is not an altogether homogeneous poem as regards either authorship or idea, but, as it has been interpreted by devout minds in India, it may be said in general terms to have taken among Hindus something like the place of the Fourth Gospel amongst Christians. The *Bhagavadgita* contains no polemic against contemporary Hinduism popular or philosophic. In particular, it approves the way of the ascetic:

'constantly to the practice of control should the Ascetic set himself, remaining in a secret place, alone, holding his thoughts in check, without hopes and without possessions. Setting for himself in a pure place a firm seat neither very high nor very low with a cloth, a deer-skin and *kusa*-grass upon it. There sitting on the seat, with mind concentrated on a single point, holding the functions of thought and sense in check, he should set himself to the practice of control, for the cleansing of the self. Steady, holding his body, head and neck balanced and motionless, fixing his gaze on the end of his nose and looking not about him. Tranquil, free from fear and steadfast in the vow of continence, holding the mind in check with me in all his thoughts, so should he sit, controlled, intent on me. The Ascetic who ever thus with mind restrained sets himself to the practice of control comes to the peace whose end is calm, the peace that is in me. . . . When thought, subdued, rests only on Self, when he is free from longing for any desire, then is he called controlled. "A lamp unflickering in a windless place"—that is the simile men use when an Ascetic, with thought restrained, practices control of self.'

But it is not the asceticism of absorption that is

most praised; the true end of asceticism is worship; ' more excellent than the austere, more excellent even than men of knowledge is the Ascetic deemed; more excellent than workers is the Ascetic. Of all Ascetics, too, him who with faith devoutly worships me, whose inmost self is lost in me, I hold to be the most controlled.'<sup>6</sup>

The Gospel of the *Bhagavadgita* is deliverance by union with the divine through love. ' If one sees me in all things, and all things in me, I am not lost to him, nor is he to me';<sup>7</sup> ' they that worship me with devotion dwell in me and I in them';<sup>8</sup>

' that shape of mine that thou hast seen is very hard to behold; even the gods are everlastinglly fain to see that form. Not for the *Vedas*, not for mortifications, not for almsgiving and not for sacrifice may I be seen in such guise as thou has seen me. But through *bhakti*, Arjuna, may I be known and seen in verity and entered, O affrighter of the foe. He who does my work, who is given over to me, who is devoted to me, void of attachment, without hatred to any born being comes to me. . . .

' He who knows in verity my divine birth and works comes not again to birth when he has left the body; he comes, O Arjuna, to me. . . .

' He who shall proclaim among my votaries this mystery supreme, showing towards me supreme devotion, shall surely come to me. Nor among men shall there be any whose service is dearer to me than his; nor on earth shall there be any dearer to me than he.'<sup>9</sup>

Söderblom comments:

' nowhere else in India do we meet as here the living God. Warren Hastings was right in writing that of all known religions this comes nearest to Christianity. God has made himself known. He comes close to men. This deity does not demand that man shall finally attain the

divine on his endless wandering. Love towards God is here to fill the whole life of man, his daily work as well as his devotional exercises. . . . God breaks into the self-glorification of the ascetic, asserts his power and calls upon man to embrace him by faith.<sup>10</sup>

Albert Schweitzer, who regards the *Bhagavadgita* as 'the most idealized book in world-literature', complains that the ethical and the non-ethical are found in it side by side; not even here does Hinduism demand ethical deeds, for love to God is deemed an end in itself. Yet the *bhakti*-movement as a whole is more probably to be judged as arising from noble circles of Hindu society in their demand for a religion which does not do away with the demands of duty and honour; hence in the poem Arjuna's anxious discussion as to whether he should fight; action, duty, disinterested service are shown to be the appointed and acceptable way for man to live. Yet, if the religion which feeds itself upon the *Bhagavadgita* is ethical, Söderblom is right in his comment that an enduring weakness of Hindu religious movements lies in their inability to say 'No' to popular superstitions and unethical conceptions. Here Hinduism at its noblest differs from Biblical religion as, further, in the impossibility of finding any satisfactory historical basis for its cult of Krishna.

The *Bhagavadgita* is but one expression of the *bhakti*-movement which has been the basis of societies it would be natural to call churches. Farquhar thus describes their creed and practice:

'They believe in one personal God who is full of love and pity for those who worship him; yet they recognize the

other gods, and worship idols; they hold that the human soul is a portion of the Divine, and that it will eternally retain its individuality; they offer salvation to men of all castes, demanding faith and *bhakti* towards the Lord; they use the vernacular instead of Sanskrit; they exalt the *guru*, the religious teacher, to a place of great authority; they use a *mantra*, i.e. a secret phrase or pass-word, which is whispered by the *guru* to the novice on initiation; they partake of a sacramental meal; and each sect has its own order of ascetics as well as its congregation of the laity.'<sup>11</sup>

Typical of such worship is this hymn in praise of Krishna:

‘ What or whom shall we ask for but for thee, O thou who fillest the globe and the universe? Who else knows how to fulfil our hearts’ desires? What of other princes and kings? There is none other in the three worlds that grants liberation, none that saves us but thou. When we think upon thy name and form, sin and fever run away in fear, desire is destroyed. Hari, this name of thine is truly called such in the *Puranas*, for it drives away death and reincarnation from those they have seized. Why should I waste my speech? It is fruitless for me to praise any other but thee. O thou that destroyest the world, the great serpent is weary with describing thee. Let my spirit repose in confidence at thy feet; it is vain to ask for aught else. Thy title, “Lord of the humble”, is justified in the eyes of men; thou hast saved many a humble, many a guilty, many a sinful man. Tuka dwells at thy feet; preserve him, O God! I ask that I may serve thee.’<sup>12</sup>

#### MOSLEM SHIITES

Plotinus or speculative mystics, abstract philosophers such as the authors of the Hindu or Buddhist classics, may be able to conceive of God or the divine in terms from which all anthropo-

morphisms are remote. But popular religion must be warmer and nearer to the common man than the dim intimations of the exalted few. The heart of man demands what Dr. Ambrosius Czakó has called 'the concrete God'.<sup>13</sup> Thus popular Hinduism is theistic, and the Buddha has himself become an object of worship. The same tendency can be found within Islam. On the death of Mohammed those who came to be known as the Shiites and Sunnites were divided as to the succession, with its religious implications and consequences. The Shiites increase the five duties of the Moslem by a sixth, which is devotion to the Imams. Of these Ali was the first. His son Husein's martyr-death at the battle of Kerbela in A.D. 680 is celebrated by the Shiites, particularly on the tenth day of *Muharram*, when formal passion-plays take place. The Imam of the Shiites is the Teacher of Islam, the heir of the prophetic office; he rules in the name of Allah; his supernatural qualities are imparted by a divine light-substance transmitted from Adam through the prophets, Mohammed and Ali; he is impervious to wounds; he casts no shadow. The Imam Dsha'far al-sadik says, 'Love to Ali consumes all sins as the fire consumes dry wood'. In the sect of the Ali-ilahi, Ali is represented as a divine incarnation. In Persia some of the Shiite khalifs assumed the name of 'god'. So universal, in fact, is the human demand for a concrete and personal object of worship to be the recipient of faith and love that much of the story of religion might be brought under this chapter and, in particular, the widespread and constantly recurring expectation of a

‘Messiah’. But we are here concerned primarily with a distinctive type of piety which consists in ecstatic devotion to a divine Being who yet is not identified with the totality of the divine.

#### CHRISTIAN BHAKTI

Dr. Czakó says that ‘Christianity is the only religion which recognizes the concrete God as such, i.e. as concrete and as God’. There is, indeed, no real parallel to the Christian belief that Jesus Christ as he appeared in history is at once completely human and at the same time is God or the incarnation of ‘the Word of God’. All Christian faith and worship are said to be mediated through the Person of Christ, nor can love to God, which is the first commandment, be distinguished in Christianity from love to Christ. None the less, within Christianity there are found *bhakti*-movements, as they may be called, which constitute a distinctive type of Christianity analogous to that which is found elsewhere. If Christ is always central in Christianity, yet normal Christianity is not simply ‘Jesus religion’. The apostle Paul is often said to represent a ‘Christ-mysticism’, and certainly we cannot distinguish in his thought between ‘the Spirit of God’ and ‘the Spirit of Christ’, or between Christ in us and the indwelling Spirit of God in us; but he and the first generations of Christians after him never use endearing epithets of Christ. That is the distinguishing mark of the Christian *bhakti*. It is closely connected with the mystical or spiritual interpretation of ‘the Song of Songs’ in the Bible. Such a passage as ‘let him

kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for thy love is better than wine' (Canticles i. 22) may be interpreted of the Holy Spirit with awful reverence by St. Bernard, or of the Christian sacrament by J. M. Neale, but, whenever the Bride is understood not merely of the believing community but also of the individual soul, and the language of eroticism is transferred to the sphere of religion, there is peril. We may suspect a genealogical connexion between *les noces spirituelles*, of which some of the Christian mystics have spoken, and the *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage consummated in many primitive rites. Sex as falling for almost all mankind within the sphere of the sacred has, like art and ethics, an inevitably close connexion with religion, and at lower stages of religious thought union with the divine is constantly conceived in sexual terms. Some of the Christian saints speak of marriage with Jesus Christ, but in Christian literature generally the 'spiritual marriage' is supposed to be with God and to issue in some form of deification; hence this subject falls rather under the heading of mysticism than of *bhakti*.

The Christian religion is no more delivered from aberrations and corruptions than other religions, but the story of religion shows no more moving spectacle than the type of piety evoked by adoring reverence to the Person of Christ. In this connexion the hymnody connected with the name of St. Bernard is to be compared with that of the Wesleys or with the almost ecstatic utterance of Samuel Rutherford.

' Dear Sir [writes Rutherford], I ever saw nature mighty, lofty, heady and strong in you; and it was more for you to be mortified and dead to the world, than to another ordinary man: you will take a low ebb, and a deep cut, and a long lance, to go to the bottom of your wounds, in saving humiliation, to make you a won prey for Christ. Be humbled, walk softly; down, down, for God's sake, my dear brother, with your top-sail: stoop, stoop, it is a low entry to go in at heaven's gates: there is infinite justice in the party you have to do with; it is his nature not to acquit the guilty and the sinner; the law of God will not abate one farthing of its due—every man must pay, either in his own person (may the Lord save you from that payment), or by his surety, Christ. It is violence to corrupt nature for a man to be holy, to lie down under Christ's feet, to quit will, pleasure, worldly love, earthly hope, and a hankering of heart after this over-gilded world, and to be content that Christ trample upon all. Come in, come in to Christ, and see what you want, and find it in him. I dare avouch you will be dearly welcome to him. You will find *him* the readiest way to be relieved of all your burdens. My soul would be glad to share in the joy you would have in him. The tongues of men and of angels could not tell you enough of his beauty and sufficiency. I desire your children to seek this Lord; desire them, from me, to be requested, for Christ's sake, to be blessed and happy, and come and take Christ, and all things with him.'<sup>14</sup>

#### THE MESSIANIC HOPE

The God of the philosophers tends to be remote, impersonal, vague. There is an instinct of the human heart for ' the concrete God '. This may be interpreted as a psychological state no more significant for truth than that a fish, if it were supposed to have a religious sense, would presumably think of God as an enormous fish. On the other hand,

according to the principle of the Schoolmen that Nature does nought in vain, it may be argued that, as the swallow's wings are correlative to the sky and hunger to the bounty of Nature, so a necessary demand of the human spirit implies that which is its satisfaction. These are ultimate questions beyond our present purpose, but it may be surmised that this imperious demand for 'the concrete God', who may be the recipient of the personal devotion, so hardly given to One conceived as transcendent and remote, has been powerfully operative in the varicd but widespread expectations of a coming Deliverer.

The Messianic hope is not in principle peculiar to the Hebrews. Thus in the *Gathas*, the earliest documents of Zoroastrianism, the *saosyanto* or Future Deliverers are Zoroaster and his fellow-workers; they are conceived as spiritual guides on earth in distinction from the *Amshaspands*, the Holy Immortals, in the heavenly sphere. But later thought came to predict one single pre-eminent *Saosyant*, a purely supernatural figure, born of a virgin, of the family of Zoroaster, who, being himself 'incarnate Right', will 'make the power of the Lie to disappear from the world of the Good', and administer to mankind the drink of immortality. But neither this conception nor the vaguer Messianic hopes of which the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil is supposed to bear witness are comparable to the fervours of *bhakti*. Yet there is a common underlying principle or insight. In fairly clear distinction from the solemn but distant worship of the Most High God, from the Mysticism of absorp-

tion in the Divine, from the cult of the processes of Nature, and, more particularly, from abstract reflections upon God impersonally conceived, is the religion of the concrete, personal God, a religion of the heart and feelings, of intimate relationship, of salvation by love.

#### PLATO

Yet it is not in fact necessary that the divine as an object of love be conceived in the full sense as a person. We may reckon amongst *bhakti*-movements that purely spiritual and intellectual love which finds its classical expression in the writings of Plato. In a famous passage of the *Symposium* the Mantinean stranger explains to Socrates the various grades of love. There is the natural love which begets children. But there is the higher love of 'Temperance' and 'Justice'. He who in youth has had the love of these instilled into him will himself desire to generate a spiritual issue of moral and intellectual beauty. 'Who,' for instance, 'when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones?' These, however, are only 'the lesser mysteries of love'. The highest mystery is not to be easily attained:

'for he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and first, if he be guided by his instructor aright, to love one such form only—out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is one

and the same! And, when he perceives this, he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honourable than the beauty of the outward form. So that if a virtuous soul have but a little comeliness, he will be content to love and tend him, and will search out and bring to the birth thoughts which may improve the young, until he is compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of institutions and laws, and to understand that the beauty of them all is of one family, and that personal beauty is a trifle.'

Then at last he will attain to the vision of a single science, 'which is the science of beauty everywhere', and finally he will become aware of Beauty itself, 'absolute, separate, simple and everlasting', a Beauty which without diminution or any change imparts to all other things their partial and transient beauty.

'And the true order of going, or being led by another to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty and at last knows what the essence of beauty is.'

The aesthetic approach to religion is distinctively Greek. Absolute Beauty in Plato's thought is not an abstraction; it is rather the completely Real; it is a higher, a more inclusive category than the Good. It is not quite personally conceived; yet it is something with which a man may hold converse; it is a name of God:

‘ What if a man had eyes to see the true beauty—the divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colours and vanities of human life—thither looking and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine? Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may.’<sup>15</sup>

If the idea of such friendship with God is amongst the most exalted conceptions of the human spirit, it could not be the religion of ordinary men. Yet this idea, particularly through Aristotle’s conception of the whole universe drawn to God as an object of desire, has been profoundly influential in Western religious thought both pagan and Christian. It is plain, however, that an altogether new element, deepening and quickening, enters into religion where it is believed that the human love is answered by the divine, and that there is a reciprocal movement from the divine to meet the aspiration of the human heart.

## CHAPTER VI

### RELIGIONS OF WILL

**ANIMATISM** connotes the belief in some vague, diffused life-force. Animism supposes this life-force to be centred in individual 'spirits' not yet conceived as persons, yet distinguished by some sort of individual will or initiative; a spirit is to be known by its activity for better or for worse. The world may be pictured as the playground or battle-ground of unrelated, discordant, and capricious and irrational spirits or deities; but when the idea of will or activity in the higher forms of religion is attached to God, a distinctive type of piety arises. In relatively clear distinction from religions of feeling or emotion such as the various *bhakti*-movements or from the philosophic and rational religions resting upon thought and speculation are those which conceive of God primarily as living, active, imperative, the Lord of Nature and of History.

#### ISLAM

Islam, though it appears late in time, may be taken as an outstanding example of a religion of Will. Mohammed was born about A.D. 570. In his early days as a camel-driver he visited South Arabia, where he came into touch with the contemporary prophetic movement of the *hanifs*; indeed, he called himself at one time an *hanif*<sup>1</sup>. Ibn Hisham

tells of an *hanif*, an old man when Mohammed was young, who prayed at the Kaaba, 'O God, would that I knew which way is most pleasing to thee, that I might serve thee, but I know it not'; and when in later years Mohammed spoke of the unity of God and of the Judgement, the men of Mecca rightly said, 'we and our fathers have heard that before'. At one time, too, Mohammed was in close touch with Christians and Jews; later he became violently anti-Jewish and anti-Christian, describing his opponents as 'the donkeys who carry books without understanding them'. At the age of twenty-three he married Khadijah, who was thirteen years his senior. He was about forty when he received his 'call'. He was troubled by paroxysms and cataleptic seizures and believed himself to be possessed; at one time he contemplated suicide. After a second religious crisis new revelations followed without intermission; he no longer waited for special ecstasies but took the voice within for divine inspiration. In A.D. 619 Khadijah died; she had been a clever and energetic woman who would brook no rival and kept a firm hand on Mohammed. After her death there came a change in him, nor can he be acquitted of deceit and sensuality. He died on 7 June, A.D. 632. His enigmatic character has thus been sketched by Doughty:

'The most venerable image [in the minds of the Arabians, he says] is the personage of Mohammed; which to us is less tolerable; for the household and sheykhly virtues that were in him—mildness and comity and simplicity and good faith, in things indifferent of the daily life—cannot amend our opinion of the Arabian man's barbaric ignorance, his sleight and murderous

cruelty in the institution of his religious faction; or sweeten our contempt of an hysterical prophetism and polygamous living. Mohammed who persuaded others, lived confident in himself; and died persuaded by the good success of his own doctrine. What was the child Mohammed?—a pensive orphan, a herding lad: the young man was sometime a caravan trader, wherein he discovered his ambitious meaning, when he would not enter Damascus! He was a soaring and wounded (because infirm) spirit, a musing, solitary conscience; and his youth was full of dim vaticination of himself, and of religious aspiration. A soul so cast will pursue the dream of those her expert and self-loving years: and how long soever, difficult, ay, and perilous be the circuit which lies before him, it were lighter for such an one to endure all things than fail of his presumption and (finally) to fall short of his own soul.’<sup>2</sup>

It would seem that the vast and solitary desert, as likewise the unlimited horizons on the ocean, predispose and lead the heart of man to a sense of God as the Creator and the Lord of Nature. Even if Mohammed was, or in his later years became, in some degree a charlatan, there is little doubt of the reality of his sense of God.

‘Blessed be he in whose hand is the kingdom, for he is mighty over all! Who created death and life, to try you, which of you does best; for he is mighty, the forgiving! Who created seven heavens in stories: thou canst not see any discordance in the creation of the Merciful! Why, look again! canst thou see a flaw? Then look again twice!—thy look shall return to thee driven back and dulled.

‘Verily in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the succession of night and day are signs to those possessed of minds, who remember God, standing and sitting or lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth. “O Lord, thou hast not created this in vain.” We celebrate thy praise.

‘ Dost thou not see that God joins on the night to the day, and joins on the day to the night, and has subjected the sun and the moon, each of them runs on unto an appointed time? And that God of what ye do is well aware? That is because God, he is true, and because what ye call on beside him is falsehood, and because God, he is the high, the great! ’

‘ Look then to the vestiges of God’s mercy, how he quickens the earth after its death; verily, he is the quickener of the dead, and he is mighty over all. . . . God is it who created you of weakness, then made for you after weakness strength; then made for you after strength weakness and grey hairs; he creates what he pleases, for he is the knowing, the powerful! ’

‘ He is God, there is no God but he; to him belongs praise, in the first and the last; and his is the judgement, and unto him shall ye return.’<sup>3</sup>

The ethic of Islam is not large and generous but stern and rigorous; it is rooted in the fear of the living God whose will is law; yet it is not without mercy:

‘ thy Lord has decreed that ye shall not serve other than him; and kindness to one’s parents, whether one or both of them reach old age with thee; and say not to them “ Fic!” and do not grumble at them, but speak to them a generous speech. And lower to them the wing of humility out of compassion, and say, “ O Lord, have compassion on them as they brought me up when I was little!” Your Lord knows best what is in your souls if ye be righteous, and, verily, he is forgiving unto those who come back penitent. And give thy kinsman his due and the poor and the son of the road; and waste not wastefully, for the wasteful were ever the devil’s brothers; and the devil is ever ungrateful to his Lord. . . . And slay not your children for fear of poverty; we will provide for them . . . and draw not near to fornication . . . and slay not the soul that God has forbidden you, except for just cause. . . . And draw not near to the wealth of

the orphan save to improve it. . . . And give full measure when ye measure out. . . . And walk not on the earth proudly. . . . All this is ever evil in the sight of your Lord and abhorred.'<sup>4</sup>

Mohammed was in his day a reformer; he made of many tribes a nation; he alleviated slavery and various hideous customs such as infanticide; he limited the number of wives that a man might possess and forbade the taking of women against their will in payment for a debt; he did away with image-worship.

The Moslem believes in God, the One, the Mighty, the Merciful, in the Last Judgement and in Predestination or the Invincible will of God; every event is *maktub* or 'written'; 'the first thing that God created was the pen'. The will of God is interpreted in a fatalistic sense. The piety of Islam may most clearly be seen in commonly quoted proverbs or ejaculations: 'the Lord may work much mercy before the morning' (when the outlook is bleak); 'it is written' (when one takes a risk); 'there is no might and no power save in God the Mighty' (to express astonishment or alarm or hopelessness); 'God is greater' (on hearing of a death or a fire or a great calamity); 'we are from God, and to God we return' (in the presence of calamity); 'fear God, O man' (when a man is behaving badly); 'he went to be with God' or 'he returned to his Master' or 'he has gone to a compassionate and benevolent One' (when a man has died); 'behold, God is looking' (when a man does wrong). Islam ranks among the higher religions as a worship of the one God, who is merciful

and whose will is righteousness, but in so far as it keeps to the Koran it bears all the limitations of desert Arabia.

#### MAZDAISM

Trial by ordeal is an almost universal practice amongst primitive peoples. It takes many forms; in Hinduism, for instance, there are ten, the chief being the ordeal by scales and weights, by fire, by water, and by poison. The implicit presupposition of this custom can only be that, when human skill is insufficient to detect guilt, there is a power inherent in things to reveal iniquity and vindicate justice; in other and more philosophical words, the Universe is a moral order. In the ordeal, however, the nature of things speaks only when consulted. At higher stages of civilization it is believed, if somewhat vaguely and ineffectively, that Heaven actively vindicates the righteous cause. Thus in Chinese thought 'the Will of Heaven' is intimately connected with a good social order; the Greek could pray to Zeus of the Popular Assembly (Zeus Agoraios), and our primitive forefathers invoked 'God of the Thing' (or Public Assembly), as we gather from an inscription to Mars of the Thing (Marti Thingso) found in 1883 on Hadrian's Wall. From many ages and many religions we could parallel the words of John of Gaunt:

But we our quarrel to the will of heaven,  
Who, when they see the hours ripe on earth,  
Will reign hot vengeance on offenders' heads. . . .  
God's is the quarrel . . .  
Let heaven revenge. . . .  
God, the widow's champion and defence.

But, as in primitive religion the belief in the High God often remains misty and otiose, so this deep conviction that there is 'a Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness' has remained for the most part in the hinterland of man's thought, a comfort to the oppressed but no terror to the oppressor. But, when the notion of active will, which we connect with animism, is brought into effective connexion with the ethical conception of the Most High God, a new plane of religion is achieved.

The Most High God as apprehended by Zoroaster is pre-eminently the living God of the righteous will demanding righteousness of his followers. To be a believer is to be a warrior for the Right or Truth (*Asha*) against the Lie (the *Druj*). Such dualism as Zoroaster contemplated was temporary only; he had no doubt of the ultimate victory of the Good.

'Now I will proclaim to him who will hear the things that the understanding man should remember, for hymns unto Ahura and prayers to Good Thought; also the felicity that is with the heavenly lights, which through Right shall be beheld by him who wisely thinks. Hear with your ears the best things; look upon them with clear-seeing thought, for decision between the two Beliefs, each man for himself before the Great Consummation, bethinking you that it be accomplished to our pleasure. Now the two primal Spirits, who revealed themselves in vision as Twins, are the Better and the Bad in thought and word and action. And between these two the wise one chose aright, the foolish not so. And when these twain Spirits came together in the beginning, they established Life and Not-Life, and that at the last the Worst Existence shall be to the followers of the Lie, but the Best Thought to him that follows Right. Of these twain Spirits he that followed the Lie chose doing the worst

things; the holiest Spirit chose Right, he that clothes him with the massy heavens as a garment. So likewise they that are fain to please Ahura Mazdah by dutiful actions. . . . And to him (i.e. mankind) came Dominion, Good Thought and Right; and Piety gave continued life of their bodies and indestructibility, so that by thy retributions through the (molten) metal [that is, the flood which is to be poured out on the Last Day, burning up all evil and leaving the good unharmed] he may gain the prize over those others. So, when there cometh the punishment of these evil ones, then, O Mazdah, at thy command shall Good Thought establish the Dominion in the Consummation, for those who deliver the Lie, O Ahura, into the hands of Right. So may we be those that make this world advance! O Mazdah and ye other Ahuras, gather together the Assembly, and thou too the Right, that thoughts may meet where Wisdom is at home. . . . If, O ye mortals, ye mark those commandments that Mazdah hath ordained—of happiness and pain, the long punishment for the liars, and blessings for the righteous—then hereafter ye shall have bliss.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of rewards and punishments after death is by no means confined to the religions of Will; that is a belief, widespread, if not universal; but the insistence upon moral decision and the conception of religious duty as consisting primarily as moral endeavour in a fulfilling of the purpose of God in the victory of the Good over the Evil marks a distinctive type of piety. 'In every other religion outside Israel', says Moulton of Early Zoroastrianism, 'there were demons to be propitiated by any device that terror could conceive. Zoroaster from the first bade men *resist* the devil.'

The word translated 'Dominion' (*Khshathra*) in the foregoing quotation might be rendered 'Kingdom'. Zoroaster's hope lay in the coming of the

Kingdom, which as the Rule of God is conceived as part of the Being of God, an essential attribute of God; it represents both the Consummation and its anticipations in time. Nowhere else in religious literature do we find so close a parallel to the Christian conception of the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus Christ. Christianity through later Judaism was undoubtedly influenced by Persian thought, but the idea of the Kingship of God, almost peculiar to Zoroastrianism and the religions of the Bible, arose in the two religions independently; for Jehovah was celebrated as King before the Hebrews were subject to any Iranian influences.

#### MOSAISM

Mosaism, as distinct from the religion of the Biblical Patriarchs, may conveniently be described as a religion of will. In the familiar narrative of the Burning Bush (Exodus iii. 1 ff.) God reveals himself to Moses as 'the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'; none the less, it is plain that with the leadership of Moses new elements enter into the religion of Israel. Jehovah, to use the solemn and traditional but inaccurate vocalization of the divine Name, is connected now and henceforth with Mount Sinai, with awe-inspiring theophanies described in terms of volcano, earthquake and tempest. He is 'a jealous God', terrible in his wrath, though at the same time merciful and gracious. He is the Lord of history; it is he who delivers Israel from the land of bondage into the land of promise, he who brings the Philistines from

Caphtor and the Assyrians from Kir (Amos ix. 7). He is the First Cause in all events—‘ shall evil befall a city, and the Lord hath not done it?’ (Amos iii. 6). He is the Lord of Nature; all the beasts of the forest are his, ‘ and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills’ (Psalm l. 10); corn and wine and oil are his gifts; he sends plenty or famine at his good pleasure; he sets his bow in the heavens and rides upon the wings of the storm. He is the Lawgiver; the Ten Commandments are written with his finger; they are inexorable; first and last he requires of his people their obedience. Jehovah is the God whose will is righteous; Israel is the people of the Law: ‘ And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes’ (Deuteronomy vi. 6 ff.). God, as he is conceived in the Old Testament, is not an object of philosophic meditation, nor the God apprehended in mystical ecstasy; he is the Almighty, the Righteous, the Living God.

The God of the Old Testament is the God also of the New. Christianity is too manifold and complex a religion to be brought under one heading, but the type of religion here falling for consideration is represented in Christian theology. If in very general terms and with an eye to predominant *motifs* alone it might be said that the great medieval

theologians conceived of God first and last as the Truth, or that Luther and the Wesleys with St. Paul and perhaps with St. Augustine conceived of him first and last as Grace, so Calvinism might be reckoned the Christian representative of the religion of Will—God's Will, of course, not man's. The glory of God is the mainspring of Calvinist theology, but, so far as man is concerned, the glorifying of the Name of God is chiefly to be attempted by the doing and the bearing of the Will of God. Determinist in theory, Calvinism yet kindled a very activist ethic. The medieval Church had fostered on the whole a passive acceptance of the mysterious will of God; plague and famine, war and pestilence were regarded as of his mysterious ordaining to be borne with patience by the children of a day. Lutheranism rested upon an even more far-reaching despair of the amelioration of this wicked and transitory world. But Calvinism, pessimistic though it was in respect to man's corrupt and fallen nature, yet summoned to the most strenuous ethical endeavour. This world it regarded as a marsh, treacherous, brackish, fetid; it was the task of the elect to reclaim this marsh for God; it must be drained and cleaned and ploughed and sown that it might bring forth fruit to the glory of its Lord; as an old Puritan put it: 'whatsoever things are Scriptural are politic: what was in the Bible shall yet be in the world'. The influence of this conception has spread far beyond the bounds of the churches or countries which have been technically Calvinist. The deep-seated Anglo-Saxon conviction that religion should connote

ethical endeavour in the public service is in the main the inheritance of Calvinism through the Puritans. Its roots lie in the passion of the Hebrew prophets; nor without reason has Karl Marx been called 'the last of the Hebrew prophets', for Communism, as it has developed in Russia, may from some aspects be called a religion of Will, a secularized Christianity from which all notions of transcendence have been eliminated, and where the Will of Man has taken the place of the Will of God.

The three philosophers who have most influenced the religious thought of modern Europe are Hegel, Schleiermacher and Kant. The first of these may be said to represent a religion of Thought, the second of Feeling, the third of Will. Kant is *par excellence* the philosopher-prophet of the religion of Will because, deriving his three objects of religious faith, God, Freedom and Immortality, from man's intuitive sense of moral obligation, he recognized all human duties as divine commands.

#### GOD IN HISTORY

Christianity with Judaism alone of the developed religions gives serious meaning to the historical process. To the thinkers of the *Upanishads* history belonged to the sphere of the illusory; by thinkers in China or Greece the historical order tended to be regarded as cyclic like the seasons, one age following another, from bad to worse, till the wheel turned full cycle, and the endless process began afresh. The idea that the process of history reflects a divine purpose and is guided and directed to its end by God is peculiar to the religion of the Bible.

Do events happen by luck or by necessity or by the disposition of an all-controlling Providence? It is instructive that the Latin word *fortuna* will serve all these theories. In popular usage it stands for luck, but a man's luck may be regarded as his destiny, and Virgil can write, 'almighty Fortune and inescapable Fate set me in this place' (Aeneid viii. 333), and in the very same sentence can speak of Apollo as man's guide. It is the unique distinction of Biblical religion to regard the historic order as plastic in the hands of the living God.

The history of Israel is interpreted in the Bible as the *gesta Dei*, the 'mighty acts of God'. The Hebrew, concerned with God as the First Cause, did not deny secondary causes but tended to neglect them. The passage of the Red Sea, ever interpreted as a divine interposition, is thus described: 'and Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night' (Exodus xiv. 21). The distinction of the Hebrew prophets lies neither in their foretelling of the future nor in their enunciation of a lofty ethical demand, but rather in their conviction that it is God who decides the issue of events. Their advice, for instance, upon the making of treaties and alliances rests not upon prudential considerations or a nice calculation of military prospects but upon an urgent sense that obedience to the moral demands of God was the only way of national salvation in a world of power-politics.

'Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses and trust in chariots, because they are many, and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they

look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord. . . . Now the Egyptians are men and not God, and their horses flesh, not spirit. When the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they shall all fail together. . . . So shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight for Mount Zion and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem' (Isaiah xxxi. 1, 3-5).

The creed of Israel was, first and last, historical, concerned with the acts of God in the past and the acts of God foretold and promised in the future. God, they believed, had chosen them to be his people; he had brought them from Egypt, given them his Law, entered into covenant with them, established the throne of David, chosen for himself one single place to be his Sanctuary; they believed that God had punished them for their sins in the exile, that he would forgive them, write his Law in their hearts, renew them in their inheritance and make Jerusalem the religious centre of the earth. Such a creed is, in intention, historical from first to last. The Christian creed is the declaration that the hope of Israel has been fulfilled. It is noteworthy and typical that when St. Irenaeus writes an epitome of the Christian faith it contains little doctrine; it is almost all history—God called Abraham, he sent his prophets, in the end he sent his Son, he raised him from the dead. The earliest disciples summed up their gospel as 'Jesus and the Resurrection' (Acts xvii. 18). No other religions are in this way inseparably tied to the particularity of events nor base their universal truths upon the contingencies of history.

## ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

But, even if we deny or otherwise explain those particular events which in the creed of Jews or Christians are regarded as decisive, there remains the question of the relation of the historical process in general to God. In Homer and Virgil the gods and goddesses participate discordantly in the affairs of men, being vaguely subject to all-seeing Jove, as he in the last resort to Fate. In the monotheism of Islam the will of God is arbitrary and absolute. Man is, however, inwardly aware of freedom as of destiny. It may be that the age-old argument between freedom and necessity is never to be solved by man. It was, however, one of the very great achievements of the chief age of Christian philosophy that it attempted to see the universe as a sphere of freedom, of contingency and at the same time of Providence. St. Thomas Aquinas' massive argument in this field should be considered not as a demonstration but as a statement of that view of God's relation to the world order which, as he thought, was implied in the Christian faith and validated by strict reason.<sup>6</sup> God, he maintains, is the End of all things; hence it may further be held that he governs and rules all things by his providence, directing them to their term physically or spiritually. God moves all things by the attraction of love. He holds all things in being, for as colour disappears with the quenching of the light, so all things would cease to be, did not God conserve them. Moreover, God is the principle of action in everything that is done, for God is in

all things, not locally, indeed, but by his active power. God is in all things the First Cause; he is not, however, the sole cause. Each single event is produced both by God and by a secondary cause or 'natural agent'. Thus, for instance, logs are cut by the saw; they are also cut by the sawyer, and not less they are cut by the landlord whose orders initiate the whole process, who empowers the sawyer and provides the saw. We are not, then, unfamiliar with the idea of a single event being due to various causes each fully and truly operating in its own sphere. Hence, we may interpolate, there is no contradiction in thought if we ascribe the victory of the Battle of Britain to the gallantry of the airmen, to the skill of the High Command, and to the mercy or providence of God. Further, as St. Thomas argues, the divine providence does not wholly exclude evil from the universe. We must reckon, for instance, with defects in secondary causes; tools may be poor or the material intractable; again, gradation and variety is necessary to the excellence of the universe as a whole, and this will involve the provision that some things can, and therefore will, from time to time, fall short of their object. God wills, further, that some things in the universe should be free and some contingent. Thus, though he is the First Cause in all that happens, he wills that some things should occur contingently. The evil in the world is in itself a proof of God, for except in the setting of an order of good (*sublato ordine boni*), there could be no evil. The divine providence, moreover, directs not only the whole order but also particular events

to their proper end, for a providence that was concerned with general principles only would be imperfect. But the operations of providence are mediated through secondary causes. One of these secondary causes is the will of man; this will is free, yet the motions of the will are themselves caused by God. 'Nothing escapes the divine providence, and the order of divine providence is wholly immutable, yet it is not becoming that everything which issues from the divine providence should occur of necessity.' Whatever God foresees will occur, but God foresees that some events will take place contingently, and some by the free choice of men. Prayer, it should be noted, is to be reckoned amongst the effective secondary causes in the world. We must distinguish between the universal order and particular, subsidiary orders. The universal order is immutable, but nothing prevents prayer or another secondary cause from effecting an alteration in a subsidiary order. 'Prayers therefore prevail not as altering the order appointed from eternity, but as themselves also existing under that order.' Since the divine goodness could not be represented by one single thing, a diversity of things was made by him that his goodness might thereby be the better represented. All things fall under his providence, and their variety serves to show forth 'the manifold wisdom of God'.

It may be thought that St. Thomas affords a highly poetical or religious doctrine under the misleading guise of Aristotelean philosophy, and that he states rather than illuminates the paradoxes or antinomies inherent in religious faith or, indeed,

in any view of the world which recognizes both freedom and necessity, but at least he sets out in classical form that world-view which is inherent and implicit in Christian piety.

A similar point of view but in more agnostic terms is expressed by Joseph Butler:

'That, therefore, every act of divine justice and goodness may be supposed to look much beyond itself and its immediate object, may have reference to other parts of God's moral administration and to a general moral plan, and that every circumstance of this his moral government may be adjusted beforehand with a view to the whole of it. Thus, for example, the determined length of time and the degrees and ways in which virtue is to remain in a state of warfare and discipline, and in which wickedness is permitted to have its progress, the times appointed for the execution of justice, the appointed instruments of it, the kinds of rewards and punishments and the manners of their distribution, all particular instances of divine justice and goodness and every circumstance of them may have such respects to each other as to make up altogether a whole connected and related in all its parts, a scheme or system which is properly one as the natural world is, and of the like kind. And supposing this to be the case it is most evident that we are not competent judges of this scheme from the small parts of it which come within our view in the present life, and therefore no objections against any of these parts can be insisted upon by reasonable men.'<sup>7</sup>

If Christianity with Judaism alone of man's religions deals with the process of history as an expression of the Will and Power of God, it is not alone in a doctrine of the end of history. The Zoroastrians and the Stoics looked for a universal conflagration, Buddhists for *Nirvana*, Muslim to Paradise; the Greeks and, notably, the Celts hoped

for a blessed life beyond death. Since, however, these expectations fall rather beyond history than as the goal of history, and are unrelated to the will of God as ordering events in history, they do not fall for consideration here.

The forms of religion indicated in this chapter are diverse. Such similarity as they possess arises from the consideration that on the whole and in distinction from other types of piety they stress the conative rather than the rational or affective side of personality in man or God, conceiving God as Almighty Will, as Lawgiver, as directing Providence, as Lord of history requiring obedience and strenuous moral endeavour from the faithful. *Sit pro ratione voluntas.*

## CHAPTER VII

### PROPHETIC RELIGION

THE term 'prophet' is a Greek word. It was applied to the priest who explained and translated, generally into hexameters, the inspired but unintelligible vaticinations of the Pythia at the Delphic Oracle. She was the 'inspired' person. In general use, however, the term prophet is ascribed to him through whom the inspired utterance is delivered.

#### INSPIRATION

In the least developed forms of religion man's communion with the divine is physically or quasi-physically conceived as effected through ecstasy, through the sacramental meal or the 'sacred marriage'. But both in primitive and developed religion it is often supposed that God reveals himself in speech. His word may be received through oracle or dream, through an inspired prophet or through an animal (such as the horse Xanthos in the Iliad or Balaam's ass in the Bible), through sacred books, such as the Vedas, the Avesta, the Koran, the Christian Scriptures (in which case the human element in their composition is apt to be overlooked). The substance of inspired utterances, apart from particular answers to contemporary questions, is laws or general principles as to the nature of God and of the world. At a more reflec-

tive stage the divine *afflatus* is supposed to come upon the poet or the philosopher, an invocation of the Muse being according to classical usage the proper beginning to any extended poem. Thus Philo, in the *de migratione Abrahami*, tells that in his literary labours he often found his spirit barren; he would then wonder at the power of God who opens and shuts the womb of the soul; at other times he found himself full of reflections which were conveyed to him from on high with such coercive power that he raved like a bacchante, unconscious of his surroundings, of his words and of himself. But in these literary cases a distinction, ill-defined but generally unmistakable, is drawn between the words of God and the words of a man.

Prophetic religion rests upon the utterances of some prophet regarded as inspired. Perhaps nearly all religion is ultimately of this kind. We are apt to treat primitive religion as a matter of the family, the locality, the tribe rather than of the individual, but it is to be supposed that all advance must have come through the insight and often, perhaps, the courage of some individual touched beyond his fellows with a sense of the divine and leading them to that which soon became tradition, the prophet's name being no more remembered. Sometimes a legendary hero or deity is deemed to have been the source of religious law and custom, but in general the authority of inherited wisdom is unquestioned. No one asked who first told the stories about Mount Olympus, and what authority he had for his communication, or who first asserted that man must not commit adultery and must not

steal. The Greeks, indeed, speculated upon the question in later times but found no answer. Thus Antigone can speak of

Unwritten laws, eternal in the heavens.  
Not of to-day or yesterday are these,  
But live from everlasting, and from whence  
They sprang none knoweth.

Prophecy then, in the sense of inspired utterance, may be connected with the immemorial simplicities of conscience and of natural religion as with the furthest reaches of philosophic imagination and most exalted utterances of the poet and the saint. Prophecy is correlative to revelation understood as the spoken word of God.

Shamanism or spirit-possession is a widespread element in primitive religion. The inspired person in trance seems to enjoy a knowledge that is not his own and to utter words which come from no human source. The prophetic ecstasy may be induced by various means: Elisha in Israel called for music (2 Kings iii. 15); the dervishes achieve their frenzy in the rhythmic dance; the Pythia at the oracle of Apollo sat above a cleft in the rock whence arose vapours that brought on her ecstasy. 'Inspiration', if such it be, in the lower stages of religion is usually connected with abnormal psychological conditions. It is significant that the Hebrew word for 'prophesy' means originally 'rave'.

Between the wild vaticinations of the shamanistic *séance* and the sublime utterances of poet or of prophet there is a psychological connexion. Of Saul, the son of Kish, we read that 'the Spirit of God came upon him also, and he went on and pro-

phesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah, and he stripped off his clothes also and prophesied before Samuel in like manner and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, *Is Saul also among the prophets?* (1 Samuel xix. 23 f.). The degree to which the great literary Hebrew prophets were also ecstasies is disputed, but it is in respect of their message or insight rather than their psychological condition, that we distinguish between a dervish and an Ezekiel, a Philo or Plotinus, between the clairvoyant shaman and Wordsworth roaming Salisbury Plain for three days seeing

long bearded teachers, with white wands  
Uplifted, pointing to the starry sky  
Alternately and plain below, while breath  
Of music swayed their motions, and the waste  
Rejoiced with them and me in those sweet sounds.

If it is not possible for the student of religion to draw an absolute distinction between the prophets of Israel and the prophets, whatever their name, in other religions; yet the flowering of prophecy among the Hebrews, particularly from the eighth to the sixth century B.C., is as unique as the brief intellectual summer of Periclean Athens. With the partial exception of Zoroaster and the possible exception of Mohammed in his earlier days there is no one of another religion to put beside Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah. But it will be convenient to illustrate prophecy first by a few who belong to the history of religion rather than to the history of any particular religion, nor is it by accident that such names are to be found pre-eminently in

the Hellenic world, where organized religion lagged so far behind the thought of philosophic minds. These teachers, not normally called prophets, may claim the name if with the generality of religious men we accept them as those who have received a true word for mankind.

#### SOCRATES

Socrates died as an atheist, a corrupter of youth; he confessed himself agnostic, but he holds high place among the religious teachers of mankind by reason of his reverence for the sacred and ideal. Perhaps a certain agnosticism, because it implies the recognition of mystery and of the limits of man's powers, is integral to true religion.

'In this respect only [said Socrates] I believe myself to differ from men in general, and may perhaps claim to be wiser than they are:—that whereas I know but little of the next world, I do not suppose that I know: but I do know that injustice and disobedience to something higher, whether God or man, is evil and dishonourable, and I will never fear or avoid a possible good rather than a certain evil.

'Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting anyone whom I meet and saying to him as my habit is: You, my friend,—a citizen of the great and wise and mighty city of Athens,—are you not ashamed of trying to get as much money and honour and reputation as possible, while remaining careless and indifferent to wisdom and truth and the greatest perfection of your soul? And if the person with whom I am arguing says: Yes, but I do care, then I do not leave him or let him go at once; but I proceed to interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, and if

I think that he has no virtue in him, but only says that he has, I reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the less. And I shall repeat the same words to everyone whom I meet, young and old, citizen and alien, but especially to my fellow-Athenians, because they are more closely related to me. For I know that this is the command of God; and I believe that no greater good has ever happened to Athens than my service to the God.'<sup>1</sup>

Socrates was no theological teacher nor in any systematic sense an ethical teacher; he subscribed to no creed; he fits into no school, but in his faithful reverence before the Right, the Beautiful and the True, as man may apprehend them, he is supremely a religious man.

The death of Socrates at the hands of the Athenians may well, as Solovyev thought, have been the turning-point of Plato's life;

'that world, in which the righteous man had to die for truth, is not the true, positive world. Another world exists, where Truth lives. Here we have a foundation in actual experience for Plato's firm belief in a truly existing, ideal cosmos, distinct from and contrasting with the visible world of physical phenomena. It was Plato's fate to deduce his idealism—and this generally has been but little observed—not from that abstract reasoning by which he subsequently explained and demonstrated it, but from the profound emotional experience with which his new life began.'<sup>2</sup>

As a religious teacher Plato has been particularly influential in Christianity, which as a sacramental religion finds a natural affinity with his thought. He may be called prophet not because he seems in the Republic to foresee the Crucifixion, but as the founder of that *philosophia perennis* which has

been the basis of the European religious philosophical tradition. His importance in respect to revelation, however, is thought by some to lie chiefly in his famous myths, on the ground that these are not appendages to his thought, like the stories incorporated in *Pickwick*, but expressions of his deepest insight where that which he apprehended slipped through the language of logic and escaped. It may be thought that myth and poetry rather than sober prose or scientific definition are the natural or inevitable media alike of man's deepest aspirations and his holiest intimations.

Twenty years older than Plato but likewise the friend and disciple of Socrates, father of the Cynic philosophy and grandfather of the Stoic school, was Antisthenes of Athens. It may seem strange to rank among the prophets one who was pre-eminently a sceptic, and who, if religion were one with theology, would be far from the centre of interest, but the story of religion is by no means identical with the records of the organized religions. Antisthenes doubted all philosophical constructions, repudiated all earthly values except moral goodness, and taught of God only that he is One, that there is none like him, and that he can neither be represented in a picture nor seen by the eye. In his case too it would seem that the death of Socrates was a turning-point in his life; a world in which Socrates must be rejected and die was a world without meaning; only one thing was sure, the goodness of Goodness. Dr. Gilbert Murray thus describes him: remembering that his mother had been a Thracian slave he

‘set up his school in Kynosarges among the disinherited of the earth. He made friends with the “bad”, who needed befriending. He dressed like the poorest workman. He would accept no disciples except those who could bear hardship, and was apt to drive newcomers away with his stick. Yet he also preached in the streets, both in Athens and Corinth. He preached rhetorically, with parables and vivid emotional phrases, compelling the attention of the crowd.’<sup>8</sup>

Moral goodness is the supreme good for man; nothing matters in life except to be good; such seems to have been the burden of Antisthenes’ teaching and witness. The view that everything in the world is valueless except moral goodness will seem to most men a sad exaggeration, but with respect to moral goodness as man’s supreme Good we are bound to ask whether this was merely the speaker’s opinion, or was an insight, though an imperfect insight, into truth and the very nature of reality, in which latter case we may ascribe to him the name of prophet and conveniently (to distinguish it from mere opinion) speak of his insight in terms of ‘revelation’.

#### JEREMIAH

The difference between Hebrew and Hellenic ‘prophecy’ lies in the genius of the Hebrew religion. For the Hebrews alone apprehended God as the living God, the Lord of history, as One with whom man may enter into personal relations. ‘The word of the Lord came to me’—it is difficult for modern men with their attenuated religious sense to apprehend how near, how real, how personal was God to the prophets of Israel. This is especially

true of the prophet Jeremiah, perhaps the greatest figure in religious history. We are fortunate in knowing much of the events of his time and of the part he played in them, as also in possessing a little *corpus* of poetry which constitutes his 'Confessions'. To these there is no parallel in the ancient world apart from some of the Hebrew psalms.

In the year 626 B.C. Jeremiah, then a youth, received his call to the prophetic office:

'the word of Jehovah came to me saying, [or, as the Hebrew puts it, "was to me"]. Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. . . . Then Jehovah put forth his hand and touched my mouth. And Jehovah said unto me, Behold I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant' (i. 4-10).

The nature and degree of psychological disturbance involved in this experience is of secondary interest; we may note as more significant, first, that the prophet is conscious of being chosen and set apart by Jehovah for his office; his personal life has been moulded and controlled by the divine purpose. It would be a mistake to read into this passage any philosophical theory of determinism; it is a purely religious utterance. Second, the prophet is convinced that the words which he speaks as a prophet are not his own but are put into his mouth by God himself. Third, the words of the prophet were regarded by him as themselves initiating and therefore in part effecting their own

fulfilment; the speech of the prophet was itself an element in that divine intervention in history to which it testified.

So far this is typical of the Hebrew prophets, but only in Jeremiah's case have we evidence of the degree to which a prophet might distinguish between his own thought or desire and the word which was given him to deliver. We can overhear Jeremiah at his prayers protesting against the treatment he received from men and crying out for vengeance upon them; protesting, too, at the sufferings and inward perplexities he was called to endure, and hearing, as he believed, in his own soul the answer from God himself.

' Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast born me [he breaks out] a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth. I have neither lent on usury, nor have men lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me. . . . Jehovah, thou knowest; remember me and visit me and revenge me of my persecutors, and not in thy long-suffering! Know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. . . . Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart, for thy name has been named upon me, Jehovah of hosts. . . . Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable? Wilt thou be unto me like a winter brook, like waters that fail?' (Jer. xv. 10, 15-18).

To this expostulation he receives the answer from on high that, if he himself will turn back to a right mind, he should stand before God; that, if he would weed out the base thoughts from the pure, he should be as God's mouth; his enemies should come round to him, he should not come round to them, ' and I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall: and they shall fight against

thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith Jehovah' (xv. 20). The agony of his soul is still more clearly revealed in a later passage: 'Jehovah,' he cries, 'thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I and hast prevailed. I am in derision daily; every one mocketh me . . . because the word of Jehovah was made a reproach unto me and a derision daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not hold out' (xx. 7-12).

It would seem that Jesus Christ in his lifetime was popularly known as the prophet of Nazareth, and his teaching can doubtless be expounded as the consummation of the Hebrew prophetic tradition, though the category would seem clearly inadequate to his stature. The ancients regarded words as powerful in themselves for blessing or for cursing, and, if the prophet should go about Jerusalem wearing a yoke (Jeremiah xxvii. 2), it would be felt that the enslavement of the people had begun. The idea may be regarded as fanciful; in any event, it was concerned with matters of long ago; but that which Jesus Christ said and was and did has profoundly modified or created human history since that day, never more obviously than in the last century and a half, nor can any limits be set to the influence that he may have upon the days to come. Christianity may be treated as a prophetic religion because it rests upon a Word of God which

is proclaimed from generation to generation, but the figure of its Founder cannot conveniently be treated within the limits set by the tradition of prophecy in Israel or elsewhere.

#### TRUE AND FALSE PROPHECY

‘Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived,’ expostulates the prophet Jeremiah, who seems to be one of the very few prophets to doubt from time to time the authenticity of his own inspiration. The Hebrews distinguished clearly between true prophecy and false. The ancient world in general had no criterion of prophecy, whether of the Pythia, the Sybil or the Hebrew *nabi*, apart from the fulfilment of the oracles given: ‘And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously; thou shalt not be afraid of him’ (Deuteronomy xviii. 21 f.). This problem pressed hardest upon the Hebrews, for no other nation in the ancient world or the modern has so depended upon ‘every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God’. We read of an occasion when the kings of Israel and Judah summoned the prophets before them to ascertain whether it would be expedient for them to attack Ramoth-Gilead. Some four hundred prophets assembled and, presumably, worked up the prophetic ecstasy, and Zedekiah ‘made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians,

until thou have consumed them. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-Gilead and prosper, for Jehovah shall deliver it into the king's hand'. Then a solitary prophet, Micaiah ben Imlah, is brought in. At first he scornfully repeats the message of the other prophets, but being pressed to speak his real mind he says, 'I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and Jchovah said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace'. In the event Micaiah appeared as the 'true' prophet, for the expedition proved disastrous. An interesting explanation follows to the effect that Jehovah has sent 'a lying spirit' upon the four hundred prophets (1 Kings xxii). We may, perhaps, more usefully draw a distinction between oracles based upon phantasy or desire and those that spring from a true insight into the nature of reality. The words of Socrates have great significance for religion, the oracles of Dodona none at all. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*; there are no outward signs by which fancy can be distinguished from inspiration.

#### REVELATION

The religions of prophecy are peculiarly liable to petrifaction, for the words of the prophets, once burning and relevant, being reduced to writing and treated as a code of instructions or philosophic system, become the basis of an arid scholasticism. In particular, the Jews, the Christians and the Mohammedans have been peoples of the Book. The basis of Judaism has been the Law, supposedly

given by God himself through Moses, greatest of the prophets, the other writings of the Old Testament being deemed of secondary authority to the Law and a commentary upon it. So sacred was the very letter of Scripture regarded that even the obvious mistakes of copyists were carefully repeated, nor was any attempt made to amend the text where it was manifestly corrupt and meaningless. The Christian Church at many periods has treated the Bible with a similar veneration. The Mohammedans developed the legend that the original copy of the Koran was laid up in heaven; but upon the text of its earthly exemplars relatively little attention has been directed by them at present.

The prophet declares a word of God; hence developed religions, where prophecy has passed beyond the stage of mere oracular response to particular questions, are disposed to distinguish the 'truths of revelation' from the truth attainable by philosophy or imparted in any other religion. Such 'truths of revelation' for St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, were the Tri-unity of God and the doctrine of Transubstantiation in the Eucharist. This distinction between two types of truth still dominates the Roman Catholic Church and has been recently revived among the Protestants, though in a slightly less difficult form. There is, on the other hand, the tradition of Christian humanism which comes down through St. Augustine, the great Franciscan theologians of the Middle Ages and the Cambridge Platonists. In a famous chapter of his *Confessions* (vii. 9) St. Augustine says of certain

books of the Platonists translated from Greek into Latin,

'therein I found, not indeed these precise words, but precisely the same truth fortified with many and divers arguments, that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made; in him is life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not". Further, that the soul of man, though it bears witness to the light, is not itself that light, but God, the Word of God, is the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And that "he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not". But that "he came unto his own, and his own received him not, but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name"—that I could not find there. Also I found there that God the Word "was born, not of flesh nor of blood nor of the will of a man nor of the will of the flesh but of God". But that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us", this I found not there.'

The importance of this passage depends, not on the degree to which St. Augustine be judged rightly to have interpreted the Neoplatonic books, but rather in his recognition that God had revealed many of the central truths of the Christian faith outside the limits of the adherents of that faith, and in his implicit assertion that the new element in Christianity distinguishing it from the nobler religions of the world lay in the historic figure of Jesus Christ. A survey of human religion would tend on the whole to support this judgement.

## MYSTICISMS

## THE MYSTIC EXPERIENCE

MYSTICISM in the sense here understood is a distinct type of religious outlook or experience, but, once again, the warning is necessary that rarely if ever is a man to be found who is only a mystic, and that mysticism is blended with other types of religion, even those which *au fond* or in logic might appear incompatible with it. The term 'mysticism' in popular usage is sometimes applied to all forms of religious feeling or experience, even to the vision of the poet or the enjoyment of music; 'mystical', in fact, comes to be simply the opposite of 'scientific'; wherever man claims to apprehend the infinite through the finite, or the eternal through the temporary, he is popularly called a mystic. In this chapter, however, the term will be used only of those various forms of religion which in one way or another claim or imply something like the deification of the believer or the devotee; he is lost in God or becomes a 'partaker of the divine nature'.

That this is a widespread and distinct type of piety may be indicated by a few brief illustrations:

'I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, "O Thou I"';<sup>1</sup>

'... identify yourself completely with infinity-eternity and wander in the non-self';<sup>2</sup>

'we bury ourselves in the "divine darkness"';<sup>3</sup>

‘ . . . when, in a deep ecstasy, God unites the soul suddenly to his essence, and when he fills her with his light, he shows her, in a moment of time, the sublimest mysteries and all his secret things. And the soul sees a certain immensity and an infinite majesty. . . . The soul is then plunged, as it were, into a vast ocean which is God, and again God. She can neither find a foothold nor touch the bottom ’;<sup>4</sup>

‘ God himself knows and loves himself in us ’;<sup>5</sup>

‘ All, whatsoever is here, that is the One, Acyuta. From him there is no other, nothing different; he is I—he is also thou, he is all this. Therefore let go the mirage of multiplicity ’;<sup>6</sup>

‘ O thou happy one and blest, a god shalt thou be instead of a man ’;<sup>7</sup>

‘ I beheld the Light and I fixed my gaze upon it until I became the Light ’;<sup>8</sup>

Of these quotations the first is from a Mohammedan, the second from a Chinese Taoist, the third from a modern Jesuit, the fourth from a friend of St. Teresa in the sixteenth century, the fifth from Meister Eckhart, the sixth from a Hindu, the seventh from an Orphic inscription, and the last from a Mohammedan. The writers use various dialects, but all presuppose a loss of selfhood through intimate union with the divine, and this as an experience open to man in this present world. Sometimes the language is that of identification of the self with the divine, as not infrequently among the Mohammedan Sufis; sometimes of absorption in the divine as in pantheistic cults; sometimes of intoxication or indwelling as in the mysticisms of Dionysus and of Erôs; sometimes of the marriage relationship as in the ‘ spiritual marriage ’ recognized in mystical forms of Christianity. The dif-

ferences are important, but not less significant is the prevalence in many ages and religions of the belief, based upon 'experiences', that man may be so united with the divine that the term 'deification' seems not inappropriate.

The discussion of this aspect of religion has peculiar difficulties. These high states of consciousness, if they be such, can be shown to have apparent affinity with elements in 'primitive' religion, but this of itself does not in any degree enable us to assess their worth, and such experiences are essentially private and subjective and therefore withdrawn from scientific observation. Certainly the claim to mystic union with God cuts across the traditional differences of theology and religion. It is idle to question the actuality of the feelings which the mystics of this sort attempt to describe, but there may be various views as to their truth, that is, as to the degree in which their account corresponds with reality.

#### MYSTICISM OF POSSESSION

It will be convenient to turn back to the elements in 'primitive' religion which seem to find their development or sublimation or validity in these mystical experiences. A small boy found galloping through the trees and asked who he is, will probably reply in all good faith that he is Robin Hood or a Red Indian Chief. He might admit on cross-examination that he was only pretending to be this character, but this would be a grudging concession to the curious mentality of the adult; in his own eyes and in his own feeling he was not

pretending; he *was* Robin Hood or the Indian brave. Such impersonation is normal and healthy; but when a grown man conceives himself to be, or claims to impersonate, another, he is on treacherous ground. The witch-doctor donning his devil-mask is for the time being identified with the one whom he represents; the priest assuming his official garb is wont to claim an efficacy for his acts or words derived from the Being whom he represents. In the Shamanistic *séance*, again, the leader becomes, or is possessed by, the invasive spirit. It has been shown that there is a close affinity between the spirit-possession of the shaman, the demon-possession familiar in many parts of the world, and the spirit-controls of the mediumistic *séance*. The ecstasies of 'the sons of the prophets' in early Israelite history are plainly parallel, yet, as has been indicated above, a clear connexion or development can be traced between these primitive and unedifying extravagances and the *furor poeticus* or the sublime utterances of an Isaiah. Up to a point the psychological mechanism may be the same in all these cases, and yet in some there may be genuine contact between the human creature and the divine Spirit, while in others we may have mere psychological dissociation. As the butterfly is not the grub from which it develops, so Wordsworth or Isaiah is not merely the shaman in a more civilized guise. Yet the degrees of possible self-deception are illimitable, and the truth or value of alleged experiences of union or contact with the divine, however convincing to him who experiences them, cannot be estimated by others

in terms of the feelings or assurances which are alleged. Possession by the divine Spirit may be as much a fact as, or more truly a fact than, demon-possession or control by a departed spirit, but the private experiences here indicated cannot be the subject of scientific enquiry; the 'revelations' and ethical results of such possession can alone be subject to the judgement of Reason. It must suffice for the moment that 'spirit-possession' may be reckoned one of the roots of mysticism, and that the psychological conditions indicated by 'spirit-possession' may qualify or illuminate the claims made by the mystics in respect of their experiences.

#### PANTHEISTIC MYSTICISM

There is often a close connexion between mysticism and a pantheistic philosophy. 'Man is God, and everything is God,' said Bustani, a Persian Mohammedan. One aspect of 'primitive' religion is man's sense of his unity with nature. Through the changing of the seasons, the springing of life, the decay and death of the autumn there pulses a universal power; with this, man is identified both by his very nature and deliberately in his worship, which is a voluntary and glad surrender of himself to the natural order. In primitive circles, as we have seen, no clear distinction is drawn between the life of the family and that of the individual, or between either and the life of the crops and herds which with the family constitute the social unit. Life is impersonal. A very large part of mysticism in its highly developed or most civilized forms would seem to be a deliberate

stripping from the individual of all the particularity of his personal life and of all sensible experience, that he may sink back into union with that which is at once the All and the One. Thus in India both the Vedantist philosophy and the mystical practices of Yoga aim at the elimination of personal desire and of the consciousness of selfhood, the overcoming of the illusory multiplicity of life as it appears to the senses, that the devotee may sink back into the undifferentiated unity of Brahma, the One and the All. 'Thou art I'; the soul and Brahma are one.

This type of mysticism is fundamentally world-denying and pessimistic; it is the negation, not the interpretation, of life. The putting away of all personal desire, the stilling of the restless intellect, the relapse into a sense of the undifferentiated unity of all things may, it appears, be associated with remarkable feelings of release and even of exaltation; but, if we suppose the ascent from vegetable to animal life and of animal to rational life to be a progress, it is difficult to believe that truth and illumination, not to mention union with the divine, are to be achieved by a conscious reversal of this process. This type of mysticism, therefore, is closely connected with the idea of the impersonal sacred treated above, nor is it clear that pantheistic emotion shows any marked advance on those elements in 'primitive' religion with which it is associated.

#### EROTIC MYSTICISM

The desire for union with the divine must be deemed one at least of the recurrent motives in

man's religious history. In 'primitive' cults this is often supposed to be achieved through sexual union with 'sacred' persons. From the point of view of civilized man many of the rites of 'primitive' peoples are obscene, but the recognition that union with the divine is to be sought in the spirit alone and not through the body is perhaps one of the decisive and most revolutionary changes that mark the progress of religious thought.

The sexual life of man has always close connexions with the sacred as the sphere of infinite worth and absolute obligation; hence the fierce *tabus* of 'primitive' rites in respect of puberty and marriage; hence, too, the halo which even in the minds of civilized men may surround any sexual excitement. The language of eroticism lingers in religion even where thought of the physical has been left far behind. Of this the use to which the *Song of Songs* has been put in Christian piety is an outstanding example. But there is a deeper reason. Personal relations have their root in love, which in man has a physical basis, however much it be sublimated in reverence and reason. It is natural and perhaps inevitable that union with God through love should be constantly expressed in the language of eroticism. In many a poem it is hard to decide whether spiritual or physical love is intended or the latter used as a symbol or vehicle of the former. There is a connexion between the *hieros gamos* of 'primitive' rites and the 'spiritual marriage' of which some Christian mystical theologians speak. It would be as ill-judged to applaud the *hieros gamos* on the ground of that into which

it develops as to denigrate the latter on the ground of its humble and unattractive 'origins'. The mysticism of union by love is intimately connected with the religions of personal devotion, but when the devotee claims not merely to be united with God (*Deo unitum esse*) but to be one with God (*unum esse cum Deo*) we have passed from the devotion of love to mysticism proper.

Mysticism, then, is of various types, though these different types may be exemplified by a single person. There is the mysticism of possession, the mysticism of self-identification with the One and the All, and the mysticism of eroticism. The supreme goal of all the mystic unions, says Fr. Poulain, is 'deification'. This may be accepted of all mysticisms as well as of the Christian variety which the writer had alone in mind.

#### SUFISM

The varieties and excesses of mysticism may be curiously observed in the history of Islam, the least mystical, as it might have appeared, of all developed religions. The mystical sect of the Sufis is firmly entrenched in Islam, treating the Koran, as Nicholson says, with the sort of freedom with which Philo treated the sacred books of Israel. The first known Sufi was Rabia, a woman from Arabia; she was buried in Jerusalem, and her tomb is still visited. 'O God, if I worship thee in fear of hell, burn me in hell,' she said, 'and if I worship thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but, if I worship thee for thine own sake, withhold not thine everlasting beauty.'

This is not mysticism in the sense in which this term is here used, but this sense of union with God through love, so alien to the general trend of the Koran, was developed by the later Sufis in gnostic and pantheistic forms. Their first recognized group gathered about A.D. 815 under Abu Said Ibu Abi Khair; they became a sort of monks— forbidden in Islam—wearing white woollen garments and living in seclusion. They early adopted a pantheistic type of philosophy. ‘The whole of Sufism’, writes Nicholson, ‘rests on the belief that, when the individual self is lost, the Universal Self is found, or, in religious language, that ecstasy affords the only means by which the soul can directly communicate and become united with God.’<sup>9</sup> This, however, is not altogether happily put. No doubt, the Sufis tend to be ecstasies, and it may often be difficult to know whether we are dealing with religious poetry in their case or with a drinking-song, yet there is no necessary and logical connexion between ecstasy, as usually understood, and the loss of the Self in the Universal Self. Some of the outstanding mystics, such as Sankara and Meister Eckhart, are far removed from the visionary and emotional; Eckhart says, ‘ Satisfaction through feeling might mean that God sends us comfort, ecstasies and delights. But the friends of God are not spoiled by these gifts. Those are only a matter of emotion, but reasonable satisfaction is a purely spiritual process in which the highest summit of the soul remains unmoved by ecstasy, is not drowned in delight, but rather towers majestically above these. Man only finds himself in a state of spiritual satisfaction when these emotional storms of our psychical nature can no longer shake the summit of the soul.’<sup>10</sup>

Certainly the Sufis have not been mere ecstatics; they have put forward a considered philosophy identifying the essential part of man with the primal Intelligence or universal Reason which emanates from Deity. This essential part of man, then, corresponds with the universal animating principle which in its turn is identified with Mohammed; 'thus, Mohammed is called the Light of God; he is said to have existed before the creation of the world; he is adored as the Source of all life, actual or possible; he is the Perfect Man in whom all the divine attributes are manifested, and a Sufi tradition ascribes to him the saying, "he that hath seen me hath seen Allah"'.<sup>11</sup>

#### PLOTINUS

As the last quotation indicates, Sufi mysticism is not wholly indigenous; indeed, it would appear to be the flowering of a type of piety which in East and West was under the influence of 'Dionysius the Areopagite'. This pseudonymus author was a Christian Neo-Platonist, a disciple of Proclus, who about the beginning of the sixth century wrote on 'the Heavenly Hierarchy', 'the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy', 'the Names of God' and 'Mystical Theology'. His system was a commingling of Christian with Neo-Platonic doctrines. He became well known in the West through the translation of his writings by John Scotus Erigena, and by the ninth century he was influential from Mesopotamia to Spain.

Neo-Platonism itself was a school of thought, not an organized religion. Its most famous philo-

sopher is Plotinus. He lived in the third century of our era and represents the striving of the human spirit through thought, asceticism and ecstasy to attain to union with the One behind the many, the Eternal behind the temporal. There is a knowledge vouchsafed the soul in ecstasy that far transcends all scientific knowledge:

' there the soul is at rest, withdrawn from evils, finding refuge above in the place that is free of evil. And there she truly thinks, there is she without consciousness. And the true life is there. For the here and now without God is only a trace, an imitation, of life; but to live there is fulfilment of understanding, and in this fulfilment the soul begets gods in all peace through contact with that Being, begets Beauty, begets Righteousness; Virtue it begets. Therewith the soul becomes pregnant being full of God; that is its beginning, its end; its beginning because it is from thence, its end because there is the Good, and there, there it becomes what it was. For the here and what belongs thereto is a fall, an exile, a loss of wings. . . . Now the soul according to its nature loves God, striving for intimate fellowship, as a maiden loves a noble father in noble love. . . . Therefore it becomes us to hasten hence and to chafe at the bonds which fetter us to the other existence, so that with our whole being we may embrace God and there is no part of us with which we are not in touch with God. So is it then possible there to see him, to see oneself aright. Itself transfigured, full of intelligible light, yes, verily light itself, unburdened, as one who travels light, becoming God, nay, properly already being God—then is the flame kindled; it is quenched when the man falls back again.'<sup>12</sup>

Typical of Neo-Platonism here is the sense that this world is but a pale and distorted image of the real world which is transcendent, and that salvation comes by deliverance from the bonds of

sense. Plotinus was no ecstatic in the vulgar sense. Porphyry describes him thus:

'good and kindly, singularly gentle and engaging: thus the oracle presents him, and so in fact we found him. Sleeplessly alert—Apollo tells—pure of soul, ever striving towards the divine which he loved with all his being, he laboured strenuously to free himself and rise above the bitter waves of this blood-drenched life: and this is why to Plotinus—God-like and lifting himself often, by the ways of meditation and by the methods Plato teaches in the *Banquet*, to the first and all-transcendent God—that God appeared, the God throned above the Intellectual Principle (*Nous*) and all the Intellectual Sphere. "There was shown to Plotinus the Term ever near": for the term, the one end, of his life was to become Uniate, to approach to the God over all: and four times, during the period I passed with him, he achieved this term, by no mere latent fitness but by the ineffable act. To this God, I also declare, I, Porphyry, that in my sixty-eighth year I too was once admitted and entered into Union.'<sup>13</sup>

Erôs, understood in the Platonic tradition as spiritual or intellectual love, is to be distinguished from *bhakti* or personal devotion to a god personally conceived. At no point in Plotinus' conception of the soul's ascent, writes Dr. Inge, 'is God conceived as a Person over against our own personality'. Neo-Platonism is the mysticism of the Transcendent.

#### MYSTICISM OF IMMANENCE

But there is also a mysticism of the Immanent. If religion as falling within the sphere of the sacred be deemed a self-dedication to that which, rightly or wrongly, is deemed to be of infinite worth or to involve an absolute obligation, it becomes possible

and, indeed, necessary to regard both German National-Socialism and Russian Marxist Communism in one aspect as manifestations of man's religious nature. The Communist Party of the Russian Revolution has been described by Professor Laski as a secularized Jesuit Order; it has been other-worldly in the sense of despising the pleasures of this present evil age; it has evoked a selfless devotion; it is, or was, millenarian, looking for a better age to dawn in the near future; it has conceived itself to be the instrument of an inevitable world-process, a secular parallel to the belief in Providence, and it has kindled even in times of peace a will and devotion such as normally only religion can inspire. 'It offers dogmas to those whom scepticism troubles,' writes Professor Laski; 'it brings to its believers the certitude which all great religions have conferred; above all, perhaps, it implants in its adherents the belief in their ultimate redemption.'<sup>14</sup> Communism is a quasi-religious development of the teaching of Hegel; according to the Marxist dialecticians, writes Dr. Bolshakoff, 'matter is something eternal and un-created, endowed with movement, which urges it to build continually higher forms of life. It is the philosophy of emergent evolution.'<sup>15</sup> Thus Engels could say, 'here we are back again at the conceptions of the great founders of Greek philosophy, namely, that all nature, from its smallest particular to its greatest bodies, from a grain of sand to the sun, is in eternal emergence and annihilation, in ceaseless flow, in incessant movement and change'.<sup>16</sup> In modern Russian Communist thought God as

the Transcendent is wholly denied, but the Dialectic Process, to which the name of God is not given, is the object of religious or quasi-religious devotion.

German National-Socialism, the supreme instance of an often recurring outlook, was an Immanence-pantheism of another kind. One of the abler Nazi apologists wrote:

‘whoever allows transcendence into his political discussion is already defeated, for the man who gives political recognition to the “gulf” between this world and the transcendent recognizes the necessity for the priest’s approval of the political (and then absolutely of this world’s) laws and makes political action possible for the priest’;<sup>17</sup>

Germans must not allow themselves to be robbed of their fundamental conviction that ‘the People carries its own justification in its own innermost, which we call the living blood-stream’; hence it needs no confirmation from without. National-Socialism is not a form of pantheism, for its deity is not the One and the All but the German soul, the immanent urges of the German spirit; it is, however, a mysticism; for the Nazi was, in effect, deified as he identified himself with the supposed national will incarnated in the semi-divine figure of the Führer. Any nationalism which amounts through exaggerated emotionalism and lack of rational self-criticism to a religion or pseudo-religion is in principle one with National-Socialism on its affective side.

#### CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

The appearance of mysticism in the religion of the Koran seems paradoxical and illogical; not less

incongruous, in the opinion of some theologians, is its place in the Christian Church. The Christian religion, it is said, knows no immediate union of the soul with God, since all is mediated through the historic figure of Jesus Christ. Thus W. Herrmann wrote:

‘ When the influence of God upon the soul is sought and found solely in an inward experience of the individual; when certain excitements of the emotions are taken, with no further question, as evidence that the soul is possessed by God: when, at the same time, nothing external to the soul is consciously and clearly perceived and firmly grasped; when no thoughts that elevate the spiritual life are aroused by the positive contents of an idea that rules the soul—then that is the piety of mysticism. He who seeks in this wise that for the sake of which he is ready to abandon all beside, has stepped beyond the pale of Christian piety. He leaves Christ and Christ’s Kingdom altogether behind him when he enters that sphere of experience which seems to him to be the highest.’<sup>18</sup>

However, it is certain that, whether or not this interpretation of Christianity and this implicit criticism of mysticism be admitted, mysticism, mostly of a Neo-Platonic kind, has played a large part in the story of Christian piety and has been developed into a regular system of ascetical theology by the post-Tridentine Roman Catholic Church. There, as in the Yoga practices of India, the mystic way has become a science.

‘ I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago [wrote St. Paul (2 Cor. xii. 2 ff.)] (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body

or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory.'

St. Paul is usually supposed to be speaking of himself; but even were he present, we could not well cross-question him in regard to his experience, for the ineffable cannot be uttered. We may ask ourselves, but not very profitably, whether St. Paul's experience was of a different kind from that ascribed on occasion to Plotinus, or may compare the words of the Indian poet, Kabir:

O how may I ever express that secret word?  
 O how can I say, he is unlike this, he is like that?  
 If I should say, he is within me, the universe were shamed.  
 If I say, he is without me, it is false. . . .  
 He is neither manifest nor hidden:  
 He is neither revealed nor unrevealed:  
 There are no words to tell what he is.<sup>19</sup>

We may perhaps assume that the emotional tone and the intellectual content, if there be any, in the rapture of these three men of different religions may be different, but truth and falsehood, reality and self-deception are categories which in these regions we are unable to apply by any objective rules.

Most of the Christian literature generally called mystical falls under the heading of personal devotion, and wherever that devotion is directed towards, or inspired directly by, the historic figure of Jesus Christ, we may speak of a piety that is distinctively Christian; but where we find claims of an unmediated union with God or a relation

with the divine which, as Otto asserts of Sankara and Meister Eckhart, 'rises above personal theism', or an ecstasy beyond thought and feeling and volition, we have strict mysticism or deification which is found in almost all religions and belongs in particular to none.

The Biblical phrase, 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter i. 4), may be variously interpreted. It may be taken, as in the *Theologia Germanica*, of a participation in the divine Will:

'Now what is this union? It is that we should be of a truth purely and wholly at one with the One Eternal Will of God, or altogether without will, so that the created will should flow out into the Eternal Will, and be swallowed up and lost therein, so that the Eternal Will alone should do and leave undone in us.'<sup>20</sup>

Or it may be taken of a participation in the divine Compassion. Only if it be taken of participation in the divine Essence does it become strictly mysticism. We seem to find something of this kind in some of the Christian writers. Thus St. John of the Cross says:

'the soul then by resigning itself... becomes immediately enlightened by, and transformed in, God; because he communicates his own supernatural Being in such a way that the soul seems to be God himself and to possess the things of God. . . . [The soul] reposes between the arms of such a Bridegroom, whose spiritual embraces are so real that it now, through them, lives the life of God; . . . all I say falls far short of that which passes in this intimate union of the soul with God. . . . The soul . . . when transformed and glowing interiorly in the fire of love, is not only united with the divine fire but becomes a living flame, and itself conscious of it.'<sup>21</sup>

In other parts of the field of religion we are dealing with beliefs and practices which as having a conceptual aspect can be rationally considered, but mysticism is concerned with an ineffable experience, private and incommunicable. The perils of delusion and self-deception are everywhere apparent in the study of the mystics; but those who in their own experience have in any degree 'felt the Spirit of the Highest' and thus believe that man may be in touch with the divine, to whom therefore the idea of an indwelling of holy Spirit in man is a natural and intelligible idea, will be unwilling to set limits to the degree of union with God with which mortal man may possibly be endowed. Mysticism, however, only falls under the philosophy of religion in so far as it generates or adopts rational concepts or issues in ethical conduct. The flight of the alone to the Alone is perhaps an experience, but, if so, it is ineffable.

## CHAPTER IX

### MYTH, MIME AND MYSTERY

THAT type of religion, if such it may be called, which finds expression in the veneration of some fetish or material object regarded as sacred may well be considered the most primitive or unenlightened of all the manifestations of religion. It is, however, of interest and importance that, whereas in general the line of religious development has been from the material to the spiritual, from the concrete to the abstract, we yet find material objects treated as sacred in the higher religions also. As for the artist a tree is not only an object of utility or food, but also a thing of beauty, a window into the transcendental world of beauty, and, when he paints it, men see more than a botanical specimen or baulk of timber, so to the man of filial affection his father's grave-stone, while it remains a piece of stone, is yet to him more than a common stone; it is 'sacred to the memory' of his father; it speaks of that which is altogether beyond itself. Christianity, even in its higher forms, knows sacred buildings, sacred vessels, sacred food. It would not be difficult to show that the veneration of relics, amulets, scapulars and the like amongst modern Christians is often not far removed from primitive ideas of *mana*. On the other hand, that which we describe from the outside as the mere dread of a vague supernatural

force in the case of the savage may, for all we can know to the contrary, be touched sometimes with a sense of awe, of reverence, of wonder and of mystery which may truly be called religious. That the supernatural world should make itself known to us through the material and the physical is neither mere superstition nor the esoteric doctrine of the mystery religions; it is the principle underlying the selective and interpretative work of the artist, the universality and significant speech of the poet.

#### SACRED ACTION

The sacred object is usually connected with a ritual, for it is in ritual, especially in the sacred dance, in sacrifice and in the communion meal that religious feeling naturally seeks expression. Dogma is secondary to ritual. Man acts before he speaks. We err greatly if we think of religion primarily as a system of ideas; it can be a genuine matter of the heart and life even where its conceptual elements are vague, confused or embryonic.

Dr. Oesterley vouches for this story: 'a little girl, not exceeding five years, was dancing before a picture of the Madonna and Child; after the dance, she turned to her mother and said: "Do you think the baby Jesus liked to see me dance?"' Such an incident is close to the feel of primitive religion. But, more often, the dance would seem to be an imitation of the supposed action of the gods and to be closely connected with sympathetic magic. Thus the dance is especially associated with the blessing of crops, with marriage, with the turn

of the seasons, the triumph of the sun over the winter or the victory of light over darkness. The dancers not only imitate the gods, they represent them; in the excitement of the dance they feel themselves united to the gods; what they do therefore, the gods do; the dancers by representing actually inaugurate and thus cause the event which they desire. That which is done on earth by the representative of the God effects that which it declares. Thus, in the opinion of many, the Christian priest in baptizing a child causes a transformation in the nature of the child.

The Hebrew prophets not only spoke in the name of God; they also acted. Their words and deeds were regarded with popular awe. Their oracles were deemed to be no 'mere breath'; they were 'winged words', effective to achieve that which they declared. In the same way their actions were not mere acted parables but the inauguration of that which they represented. When the prophet Jeremiah took a jar to the valley of Hinnom and there in the presence of the elders broke it with the words, 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Even so am I breaking (or I will break) this people and this city' (Jeremiah xix. 11), his words were taken for more than a threat; they were the first beginning of the doom.

#### SACRIFICE AND SACRAMENT

A sacrifice is, perhaps, first and foremost, a gift to the gods or to the spirits. If it be set before the spirits or demons, it may well be no more than a placatory offering, but, a god differing

from a spirit in that man may come into a personal relationship with him, a gift offered to a god, if it be accepted, makes in itself a bond between the deity and the worshipper, as the offering and reception of a gift binds two men together. A sacrifice is an acted prayer; it is usually accompanied by words. How may the worshipper be certain that his offering is accepted, his prayer heard? In the case of special and individual sacrifices there may be no answer to the question, but most sacrifices are duly appointed by religious custom, and their institution is often supposed to have been by divine authority. In this case, if the sacrifice be duly performed, the sacrificant is assured that his offering is accepted and he with it. But the sacrifice is very often followed by the sacred meal wherein gods and men are deemed to feast together, or the worshippers participate in the divine life and energy symbolized or represented in the victim offered. The end of sacrifice is communion.

Amongst men in their mutual relations the common meal is the instrument as well as the expression of friendship. If we still have the feeling that we have entered into a new relationship with one who has 'shared our salt', we can understand the sacred and binding relations recognized in the conventions of guest-friendship among the Arabs and other peoples. How much more, then, if God and man should sup together, or man by eating should take into himself the life of the god, would a sure bond be established between them! In the Dionysiac mysteries he who ate the flesh of the god was deemed himself to be possessed by Diony-

sus; he became himself a *bacchos*. At such ceremonies various devices are often employed to heighten the emotion or induce religious ecstasy —the sacred, intoxicating drink, music, a splendid liturgy and ceremonial; these, however, are but accessory to the central act of the rite, which is deemed to be a drama, a sacred transaction, an imparting of the divine life to the initiate. If this element is found in most religions, it is the very heart of the 'mystery religions', which offer a salvation through faith and sacrament. The sacramental 'experiences' of worshippers at Eleusis or in the temples of Mithras or in the solemnities of the cult of Isis or in the Christian Church are private and esoteric like the mystic rapture. There is no means by which they can be compared. It may be, however, of some significance that throughout the history of religion we find the belief that through some dramatic representation, some sacramental action, some common meal, man is united with the Divine. If the philosopher of religion tends to regard this as a matter of psychological 'experience' with which he cannot deal, the worshipper recognizes it as an ontological transaction. It would not seem less rational to suppose that God should reveal himself to man in action than in ideas. A family meal or a festival in celebration of some memorable event is not mere eating and drinking; it is also a communion of spirits. Such gatherings have often been for men amongst the supreme moments of their lives when, if ever, they have been conscious of the touch of the divine. If there be any self-disclosure of God

to man, it is an idea infinitely mysterious but in no way irrational that God should make himself known 'in the breaking of the bread'.

#### THE MYTH

The ritual is normally accompanied by a myth. The ritual itself may remain relatively unchanged though its original implicit presuppositions are forgotten, and ideas drawn from wholly other sources come to be associated with it.

'In reality', wrote Loisy, 'the rites preceded the myths; the divine fact, the supposed basis of the faith, never took place; it is the faith itself which imagines the fact and creates it to explain the rites and for its own satisfaction. The essential rite of the mysteries of Bacchus, the rending and eating of the living victim, was practised before anyone thought of the myth of Zagreus who, like the Titans, having never existed could not be eaten by them. Demeter never lost or found her daughter, but the agricultural rites which always formed the basis of the Eleusinian liturgy were used for the benefit of the crops before anyone told as an ancient event, accomplished once for all, the rape of Corê and her return to the world of the living. . . . So, too, the sepulchral rites of Osiris which served from the first for the kings of Egypt and which aimed to guarantee their existence beyond the tomb, were instituted before any one told of the resurrection of Osiris by the exertions of Isis as an ancient fact. The bull had to be slain by the Persians at the spring-time sacrifice before anyone imagined the myth of the creation of beings through the death of the divine bull.' Loisy adds: 'it would seem also that baptism was originally adopted by the followers of Jesus as a simple rite of purification, and the breaking of bread was celebrated by them as a festival of brotherhood, before Paul bethought him to interpret the baptismal rite as a symbol of death and the eucharistic rite as a memorial of the Passion.'<sup>1</sup>

Christianity cannot be subsumed under the heading of the Mystery Religions, but it belongs here also as a sacramental religion resting upon a *mythos* or story of a descent of the Son of God.

The rites of the Mystery Religions with their counterpart in Christianity are all connected with sacrifice—the living victim of the bacchanalian orgies, the pigs sacrificed to Demeter, the ram or bull in the ceremonies of the Great Mother, the Supper of Mithras, so closely parallel, at least in outward form, with the Supper of the Christians, the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ. All these rites, too, are connected with death or suffering—Dionysus-Zagreus consumed by the Titans, the mutilation of Attis, the bull slain by Mithras, Christ giving his life ‘a ransom for many’. These ceremonies are organically connected with sacred drama and sacrament in earlier types of religion, and all, even the most primitive, presuppose the attainment of union with the divine through the outward and the physical.

#### ORPHISM

A singular and perplexing illustration of the development of a primitive and savage rite based upon a gross myth into a personal and spiritual religion is to be found within the movement which we know as ‘Orphism’. This type of Orphism, according to M. Boulanger.

‘is in effect a revealed religion with its prophets and its sacred literature. The god suffers, dies and rises in glory. To the faithful it guarantees redemption from original sin, a mystical resurrection, and, after death, a perfect

union with the divinity; it threatens those uninitiated with eternal punishments. It preaches a rule of purity and of asceticism and considers life a dolorous trial that the soul must traverse in purifying itself.'<sup>2</sup>

But if such was the upshot of the Orphic cult, its origins were very different. Its myth, says M. Boulanger, told of the sacred marriage of Persephone and her father Zeus, probably conceived as in serpent form. From this union the young god Dionysus-Zagreus is born, and to him is promised the governance of the universe. Evilly disposed divinities, the Titans, however, seize the infant, kill it and eat it. Zeus, the Master of the gods, then punishes the offenders and raises up Zagreus, whose heart had escaped consumption. The myth presumably arose out of one of the many primitive rites of eating raw flesh. The animal slain and eaten may well have been supposed to be the god of vegetation, and the participants in the feast may have deemed themselves through this rite to have assimilated some portion of the divine force or life. At a later stage it may have come to be thought that participation through the ritual act in the sufferings and resurrection of Zagreus constituted a promise of a blessed immortality after the sufferings of this life. The myth is as crude as the rite.

In its later forms the myth of Zagreus is connected with original sin in this way: the murderous Titans are taken to be the ancestors of humanity, for, when Zeus loosed his lightning and consumed them, from their ashes the first men issued. Men thus participate in the divine nature of their progenitors, sharing also in that spirit of violence and

propensity to evil which marked the Titans. The ritual with its asceticisms and its purifications and its meal commemorating the tearing to pieces of Zagreus provided the means for the purification of this original stain, triumph over vicious dispositions, and immortality through union with the dead and risen god. Thus to the ancient myth and rite there is attached a spiritual theology, a doctrine of the human soul as divine in origin, yet subject to sin, enclosed in the prison-house of the body where it bears the penalty of an ancient crime. By discipline and union with the god in the sacrament the soul attains to eternal blessedness.

Orphism was constituted as a religion at the end of the sixth century B.C. and fell somewhat into disfavour after the Persian war. As a religion of revelation and redemption it touches deeper notes than any other religious form in Hellenic history. Its importance for our present purpose is that it rests, or claims to rest, upon revelation, that its basis is a myth purporting to declare the doings or sufferings of deity beyond the normal operations of the natural order, and that it is intimately connected with a sacramental act and with moral discipline.

Dr. Bouquet quotes from a Jesuit account of the Peruvian August festival:

‘Four sheep were offered . . . and the priest had the sancu [the loaf] on great plates of gold, and he sprinkled it with the blood of the sheep . . . and then the high priest said in a loud voice, so that all might hear: Take heed how you eat this sancu; for he who eats it in sin and with a double will and heart is seen by our father the Sun, who will punish him with grievous troubles. But he who

with a single heart partakes of it, to him the Sun and the Thunder will show favour and will grant children and happy years and abundance and all that he requires. Then they all rose up to partake, first making a solemn vow, before eating the sancu, in which they promised never to be traitors to their lord the Ynca, on pain of receiving condemnation and trouble. The priest of the Sun then took what he could on three fingers, put it into his mouth, and returned to his seat. In this order and in this manner of taking the oath all the tribes rose up and thus all partook, down to the little children. . . . They took it with such care that no particle was allowed to fall to the ground, this being looked upon as a great sin.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Bouquet comments, 'Similar accounts come from Lithuania, Athens and Tartary'.

We may cite yet another parallel from Egypt. It would seem that the cult of Osiris goes back to a primitive vegetation rite. Osiris, the corn-god, is solemnly buried when the crops are sown; he rises with the crops. A myth of his death as a result of his brother's jealousy develops; his body is dismembered, but by the intervention of his son Horus he revives and ascends the sky as 'the Great God'; he is deemed not only the founder of the social order but the august and impartial judge. The worshipper is identified with him in the cult, takes his name, and 'as surely as Osiris lives, so shall he live also'.<sup>4</sup>

#### MITHRAISM

A similar type of religion is afforded by Mithraism which, coming from the East, spread rapidly through the Roman Empire, especially in the Army, in the early days of the Christian era. Mithras was originally a god of Light and therewith of Truth.

In the myth he is the slayer of the bull whose death brings life and fertility to the earth. Mithraism was essentially, and, it would seem, exclusively, a man's religion. It is remarkable amongst the higher types of religion for the extreme rigour of the initiation it demanded. The postulant must undergo grim tests of endurance, that he might attain to courage, the mastery of himself and renunciation; he must die and rise again. At the initiatory ceremony, apparently called *sacramentum*, after passing through the vestibule of the temple he descended the steps to the decorated and brilliantly illuminated crypt, where was the image of Mithras, slayer of the bull, together with monstrous statues of the lion-headed Cronos and various mystic symbols. The strangeness, the awe and mystery of the scene and, perhaps, the effects of the sacred, intoxicating drink induced an ecstasy. The 'fathers' ruled the Mithraic church; the rest were 'brethren'. A central act of the cult was a sacred banquet, called by Cumont an *agape*, or love-feast. Apparently the meal represented in some way the final stages of the god's mission on earth. Bread and a cup of water with which wine was mixed were placed before the celebrants. The sacred beverage was supposed to convey supernatural effects, not only strength of body and material prosperity but also wisdom and moral power to combat the spirits of evil; it conveyed also the promise of immortality. The Mithraic churches were families without social distinctions. Like the Christians the Mithraists had their 'widows' and their 'continents'; they kept Sun-

day sacred to Mithras; December 25, as the day of the unconquered sun, was, in particular, a festival with them, and their initiations mostly took place at Easter. The parallels with Christianity are obvious, and it is likely that the two contemporary cults influenced one another; Mithraism, however, was no copy or parody of the Christian faith but a distinct expression of religion. Here, too, we find the claims of revelation, of ethical discipline and of sacramental communion.

#### APULEIUS

What have such rites and ceremonies meant to those who with faith have participated in them? Their secrets were well kept, but it is fair to adduce as evidence the testimony of Lucius Apuleius at the end of his famous tale, *The Golden Ass*. That, no doubt, is fiction, yet Apuleius was a philosopher, a seeker after truth, a religious man who set out upon a long course of travel that he might be initiated into various mysteries. It may be taken as certain that the vision of Isis in the eleventh book is written in serious and reverent vein. He describes how he plunged himself seven times in the sea,

‘ which number of seven is convenient and agreeable to holy and divine things, as the worthy and sage philosopher Pythagoras has declared. Then with a weeping countenance, I made this orison to the puissant Goddess, saying; “ O blessed Queen of heaven, whether thou be the Dame Ceres which art the original and motherly source of all fruitfull things in earth . . . or whether thou be the celestiall Venus, who in the beginning of the world diddest couple together all kinds of things with an ingendered love, by an eternall propa-

gation of humane kind . . . with whatsoever name or fashion it is lawfull to call upon thee, I pray thec, to end my travaile and misery and deliver mee from the wretched fortune, which had so long time pursued me. Grant peace and rest, if it please thee, to my adversities, for I have endured too much labour and peril.”

He further describes how, when he had prayed this prayer, the goddess herself appeared to him in sleep. She was garlanded with flowers, and upon her silken robe ‘ here and there the starres glimensed, and in the middle of them was placed the Moone ’. In her right hand she held a timbrel of brass, in her left a golden cup. She speaks and comforts her suppliant:

‘ Behold, I am come to take pitty of thy fortune and tribulation, behold, I am present to favour and ayd thee; leave off thy weeping and lamentation, put away all thy sorrow, for, behold, the healthful day which is ordained by my providence, therefore be ready to attend to my commandment . . . and know thou this of certaine, that the residue of thy life untill the houre of death shall be bound and subject to me! And think it not an injury to be alwayes serviceable towards me, since as by my meane and benefit thou shalt become a man: thou shalt live blessed in this world, thou shalt live glorious by my guide and protection, and when thou descendest to Hell, where thou shalt see me shine in that subterene place, shining (as thou seest me now) in the darkness of Acheron, and raigning in the deepe profundity of Stix, thou shalt worship me, as one that hath bin favourable to thee.’

There follows a vivid description of the procession in honour of the goddess on the following day. After his restoration the priest says to him,

‘ Know thou that now thou art safe and under the protection of her who by her cleare light doth lighten the other gods: wherefor rejoice and take convenient

countenance to thy white habit, follow the pomp of this devout and honourable procession. . . . Behold, Lucius, thou art delivered from so great miseries, by the providence of the goddessc Isis, rejoice therefore and triumph of the victory of fortune; to the end that thou maist live more safe and sure, make thyselfe one of this holy order, dedicate thy minde to the Obsequy of our Religion, and take upon thee a voluntary yoake of ministrie: And when thou beginnest to serve and honour the goddes, then thou shalt feele the fruit of thy liberty.'<sup>5</sup>

Here, indeed, is no description of the mysteries of Isis, but a serious depicting of the mood of thankfulness and reverence with which a neophyte approached initiation.

#### IMMORTALITY

The fellowships of the Mystery Religions are not inappropriately called churches to distinguish them from solitary thinkers on the one side and communal religions of locality or tribe upon the other. Membership in them was by personal initiation alone. They all promised an individual immortality. The vast majority of mankind in all ages, it would seem, has believed that death is not in every sense the end of life. This is shown by funeral customs, by the fear of ghosts and the cult of ancestors. But in primitive religion generally we have rather a disbelief in death as the end-all than a positive belief in immortality. The soul is often supposed to descend to Sheol or Hades, the dim and chill place of the departed, but this continuance were better described as existence than as life. More developed religions, as among the Celts, might imagine some sort of Elysium or Val-

halla for the heroic or the good; others taught the natural immortality or indestructibility of the soul, either because it was deemed a spark of the divine fire or because an immaterial substance cannot change, but the Mystery Religions offer in the sacrament a medicine of immortality to be realized in union with the Saviour-god.

#### THE LANGUAGE OF MYTHOLOGY

Myth is to be distinguished from legend in that the former treats of the doings of divine beings, the latter is a story of men. The myth raises peculiar difficulties for the philosophy of religion in respect of truth. There can be little doubt that the great majority of myths reflect the processes of the natural order: the summer and winter solstice, the growth of the grain in the spring, the decay of vegetation in the fall of the year, thunder and tempest, the movements of the stars, the phases of the moon and the like. Such may be our explanation of the myth, but to the worshipper it is a matter of traditional revelation. As such it is usually regarded by the philosopher as the work of mere phantasy, but, not least in view of its close association with poetry, myth deserves study as a possible vehicle of truth. The matter of revelation may be conceived to be propositions concerning supersensible 'truths' or an insight into the nature of God and his government of the Universe, or, finally, an account of the doings of God. If God should reveal himself to man as the living God, there seems no conceivable language in which that revelation could be expressed except the language of the

'mythos' or story in which God is the actor. Such a story cannot possess the same kind of truth as we ascribe to a scientific proposition; the divine action must be described by analogy with human action; the story will be not the truth itself but an image of the truth.

Indeed, the language of mythology seems necessary to man whenever he passes from bare description to elucidation. The Spirit of an Age or the Spirit of Progress, Nature that aims at the propagation of the species, the Forces of heredity or of economic law are as strictly mythological figures as are angels or active deities. Thucydides becomes *mythistoric* in his chronicles, and Thomas Hardy must introduce his 'Phantom Intelligences' into his record of the Napoleonic Wars. Many myths may be childish and frivolous, but the myth may be a vehicle of truth or revelation. Phoebus does not in fact drive his steeds across the sky; but, if it be granted that the stars in their courses, the revolutions of the planets and all movement in the Universe are the expression of a divine Mind or the operation of a First Cause or of a superintending Providence, the myth of Phoebus, intercident between theological truth and scientific fact, would be nearer to the full or ultimate truth than a bare scientific statement without reference to the First Principle. The matter becomes more plain and more serious when we consider those myths which do not point to events in nature. Prometheus, for instance, as his story is retold in Aeschylus, has no place in a nature-myth; he is regarded as man's benefactor who by stealing the fire from Hephaestos

at Lemnos and bringing it to men in a fennel-stalk gave them the means to master nature; moreover, he taught them the higher arts of civilization. For these services to man he was punished by Zeus and bore illimitable suffering on man's behalf. Clearly this story is not true in the sense of retailing events that actually happened. But is it to be regarded as a mere freak of the random imagination of the poet or as expressing an insight into the nature of reality or the nature of God? It was by no accident that much of Aeschylus' play, *Prometheus Bound*, was in later centuries taken up into a Christian Passion Play, the *Christus Patiens*. The generality of men have accepted the *Prometheus Bound* as a work of tragic beauty; such it could hardly be if its central idea were taken for a falsehood absolutely; but the truth, if such there be, to which it points will be a truth of poetry or revelation, not a deduction from nature or from philosophical premisses. The same question of truth arises in connexion with the Orphean myth, for instance. Dionysus-Zagreus, who never existed, was not as a matter of fact torn asunder by the Titans and raised from the dead by Zeus; man is not born from the ashes of the Titans, and participation in the Orphean rites we cannot easily regard as a pledge of eternal blessedness. It is possible, however, that the Orphean religion in its highest developed form expressed a prophet's insight into human nature or the Being and Purpose of God. The truth of poetry or religion must be distinguished from scientific or historical truth.

## CHRISTIANITY

Chief and most enduring of the religions of revelation, 'mythos' and sacrament or dramatic action is the Christian. It is believed by all sections of Christianity that the Bible is, or contains a divine revelation, a Word of God; the kernel and distinguishing mark of Christian theology is the doctrine that a divine Being, the Son of God, came down from heaven and was made man; he lived on earth, he suffered, he died; God raised him from the dead and set him on the throne of the universe. The central act of Christian worship is the drama of the Mass or Communion Service, which is a memorial of the Passion of Christ, a eucharistic act of worship, an eschatological meal looking forward to the perfected Kingdom of God beyond this world; it is the general belief of Christians, expressed in various forms of theology, that those who worthily partake of the holy meal do really partake of the life of Christ and are made one with him in the sacrament.

The Christian religion likewise rests upon a 'mythos' in the sense of a story told of a divine Being, the Son of God. This, however, is to be distinguished from the other myths of antiquity in that its basis is historical. That Jesus of Nazareth really existed as an historical person is not open to serious question. But how much do we really know about him? Can an authentic and credible picture of him be detected through the mist of legend and tradition? Great labour and literary ingenuity has been spent upon the attempt to detect the assumed

'Jesus of history' behind the divine Figure represented in the Gospels and Christian literature. The attempt has been unsuccessful. It is possible, no doubt, to trace a certain development in the tradition and to suspect a heightening of the effect here and there in the interests of piety, but, if substantially the Gospels are not to be trusted, we must admit that the truth about Jesus Christ is a matter for speculation, not for scientific enquiry. It is not the case, as was once surmised, that the supernatural traits in the picture of Christ in the Gospels are a sort of excrescence the easy removal of which leaves us with a credible picture of a normal human being; for the supernatural, as we call it, is the very stuff of the Gospels. Christ is throughout them represented as one who, implicitly and explicitly, made claims such as no sane man may make. He claimed to bring to men the Age of God and to effect by his death a new relationship between man and God; he demanded of men an obedience and service such as only God may demand; he indicated that man's eternal destiny depended upon his attitude to his own Person. His deeds corroborated his words: he cast out devils 'by the finger of God'; he healed the sick and forgave their sin; his mission was a destroying of the works of the Devil and an inauguration of God's Kingdom or Reign; he rose from the dead. These elements are of the essence of the testimony to him in the New Testament. If we eliminate them as unhistorical and legendary, we are left with an almost complete scepticism as to what he may have been and done. There is

grave difficulty in accepting the story as it comes to us; there is also very serious difficulty in the way of rejecting it, for there is no intelligible alternative account of the origins of the Gospels, of the growth, the faith and the continuance of the Christian religion. If the way of faith commend itself, we shall be compelled to say with Harnack that Christianity is not so much one myth among others as 'the myth come true'.

## CHAPTER X

### CONCLUSION

#### RELIGION

IN the preceding pages the main types of religion have been indicated. No attempt has been made to draw in perspective and proportion a picture of religion as it is or as it has been in the world. That would be a very different and a much sadder task. Whether what we call religion has in fact produced more happiness or more misery in history is a question that cannot be answered. Various 'moments' in primitive religion have been sketched, and it has been shown how from these roots the human spirit has flowered in very various ways. The majority of mankind to-day may be still more or less in the animistic stage; such religion as it has is rather a fear of spirits than a worship of the divine; it has little to do with ethics, with happiness, with any conscious relation to God. The picture of the happy savage uninhibited and unsophisticated, with the gay, free spirit of a child, is sheer romance and quite unrelated to reality. It may be true that religion alone can satisfy the heart of man, but, if it is, this purpose of religion has but little been achieved.

This essay has been concerned with ideas and has thus inevitably set religion in a false perspective; for religion represents primarily, not man's speculations about the unseen, but his attempts

to live aright in a world which he dimly apprehends as being informed with absolute values and as intimating super-natural demands.

Religion is not a pretty subject of study; it is often grim, gruesome, cruel and horrible. Those who wish to show that religion has retarded the mental and spiritual life of man, perverted his natural kindly instincts, and darkened human history with its persecutions, its cruelties, its wars, its obstinacies, its fanaticisms and its superstitions can find plenty of evidence to their taste. But in these days of the first atomic bombs with still more appalling developments promised us in the near future it would be as easy, and as silly, to defend the thesis that the world would have been better had the men of science remained in darkness. There is, however, this distinction, that while scientific study is primarily a matter of the intellect, religion is also allied with the feelings and the temperament. It is therefore open to many and various perversions: in some cases it exaggerates neurotic tendencies, if in others it affords a healing influence; the religious man has often the temperament of the poet, the artist, the genius; he is peculiarly liable to self-deception and to imagining a halo around his various distempers. Judged by all ordinary standards the confirmed atheist may be a happier and better man than many who are notably religious in their speech or practice.

None the less, almost all the acknowledged teachers of mankind have, in one way or another, been religious. There seem, it is true, to be men who have as little sense for religion as the tone-

deaf for music or the colour-blind for painting; but this may be doubted. A repugnance for organized or traditional religious forms does not of itself prove irreligion, and there would seem to be very few amongst men who have no reverences, no awareness of infinite worth or of absolute obligation, no intimations of a super-natural or super-sensible world environing them and making itself known in conscience, in beauty, in love and loyalty. To those wholly without religious sense, if such there be, the story traced in the preceding pages would bring conviction only of the illimitable degrees and varieties of human delusion. But to the man of normal sensibility the facts sketched above must be as moving as they are weighty. If it be granted that mortal man may have some true awareness of a supersensible world, a supernatural environment, a spiritual destiny, that some commerce is possible between man and the Being whom we mean by 'God', we may consider whether any conclusions can be drawn from this brief survey of the development of religion in the world. Are we in a position to say that some religions, or some one religion, may be deemed true and others false? Can there be a philosophy of religion or only a philosophical treatment of particular religions? Religion is obviously a manifold; is it also a unity? What is the relation between religious aspiration, religious experience, and truth? In particular, how is Christianity, the historical religion of the West, related to the other faiths? Is Christianity one religion among many or may it in some sense claim finality? These questions

are inevitably raised, but cannot here be answered; only a few comments and observations will be in place.

First, then, it seems clear that the diversely named religions which men profess do not correspond with the real differences of religious outlook or attainment. The mystics, the ascetics, the devotees, the rationalists speak kindred dialects across the divisions of religious profession and often appear more akin to their fellows in other religions than to the majority of those who nominally share their faith. The religion of China, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and primitive religion, are vast amalgams of ideas and practices, heterogeneous and confused. There would be no clue through the labyrinth unless it were to be found within ourselves. But as there is, we may hope, something of the hero as well as something of the criminal in each of us, something of love as well as much of egotism, so there is something of the mystic in all, something of the rationalist, something of the devotee, something of the God-fearer. All men share a common human nature; sympathy, imagination and self-knowledge can make us intelligible to one another. Religions differ in proportion and emphasis; they are rooted in a common nature.

The question of the truth of religion may be approached from many different sides. We may, for instance, argue that the various types of religion point to deep-seated needs and demands of the human spirit, for union with the divine, for instance, for a life victorious over circumstance,

for a Redeemer, for a Providence worthy of trust, for supernatural help or supernatural illumination of the mind. Such needs or demands might be illustrated from many religions. It may be argued then that, as hunger is correlative to the food which earth provides, and as the sexual instinct is correlative to home and family, so it would be a surd in nature that there should be no objective reality to correspond with the hunger and love of the human spirit. That religion, therefore, might claim to be true and final which provided a rational and emotional satisfaction to all these needs. The argument would have a certain cogency, for human life is really meaningless and Reason is shown to be un-Reason, if nothing in reality corresponds with man's spiritual desires and experiences. Yet man's desires and feeling are not the measure of the Truth.

On the other hand, we might assume that 'in sundry manners and in divers fragments' God has made himself known to man in the course of history, and attempt to find some factors of revelation common to all forms of religion, regarding these as the agreed foundation of religious truth. There would be value in this argument too. If thought be in any degree the measure of reality, we might suppose that whatever all religious men are constrained to think must be a dictate of reason. But we should not get far along this line, for how shall we find a common element in such great variety, and in the search for truth why should we prefer the opinions of ordinary men to the insights of the genius?

It may be said that certain types of religion appeal to certain temperaments, and this is no doubt true, the corybantic to the Phrygian, the mystical to the Hindu, the practical to the American, the speculative to the German, but if religion be *au fond* a matter of taste and temperament, it has no place in philosophy.

#### RELIGIONS AND RELIGION

But religion is, ultimately, not a matter of temperament or even of speculation, but of response to that super-sensible reality of which all men, or most men, dimly or clearly are aware. It is not given to all men to see the same part of the spiritual landscape nor to see with equal clarity; man's response may be right or wrong, perfect or imperfect, but, because his super-natural environment—better called God—is one, there is a unity in religion amid all the diversities and divagations of the various religions.

Through long centuries Christianity, virtually isolated in Europe, hardly took cognizance of other religions except to regard them as false, as devilish impostures and idolatry. The discovery and scientific study of other religions in modern times has set new questions to those who profess Christianity. It is not merely that innumerable 'parallels' to such articles of the Christian faith as the Virgin Birth or Resurrection of Jesus Christ have been adduced from the storehouse of religions ancient or modern; it is rather that the personal religious experience of Christians appears to find its counterpart in other faiths. Jesus Christ may appear in a

vision to a Protestant, the Blessed Virgin to a Roman Catholic, Krishna to a Hindu, the goddess Isis to Apuleius. On what grounds can we claim that the vision or experience is true or valid in one case and not in all the rest? Christianity now appears as one religion among many, a specimen among the curious and moving manifestations of man's sense of the Infinite and the Eternal.

Many years ago J. N. Farquhar published a book under the title *The Crown of Hinduism*. In it he tried to show that the highest insights and aspirations of Hinduism found their realization and fulfilment in the Christian faith and there alone. Whatever philosophical truth there may be in this contention, certainly empirical Christianity is not the crown of Hinduism, for empirical Christianity is the motley variety of Christian denominations as they actually are and have been. Farquhar meant, however, that, in principle and when properly interpreted, Christianity meets the needs, fulfils the aspirations and purifies the partial insights of Hinduism as of every other religion; it satisfies the reason and the heart of man as such; it is in principle not one religion among many but religion itself. At the moment we are not concerned with the ideal claims of Christianity, but with the question whether this brief survey of religious types indicates that there is such a thing as religion in distinction from religions: whether, that is, the study of empirical religion points the way to a philosophical construction.

Primitive religion is relatively unreflective response to that sense of mystery or, as religious men

would put it, to that supernatural environment of which man from the first is conscious. A tree or a stone, being what they are seen to be, may yet also be more than mere tree or stone, for they are felt to be charged with a mysterious power, to be the proper objects of awe and wonder, to be meeting points (if we may philosophize a dim and inchoate apprehension) of the ordinary natural order and an extraordinary or supernatural order; a stream or grove to primitive man, as to the poet after him, may appear to be no mere flux of water or group of trees, but the abode of hidden spirits half personally conceived, haunting the spot made sacred by their presence and whispering their secrets of dread or comfort to mankind; the ancestors of the family, the heroes of the tribe are felt in some dim way still to be linked with the present generation either by their needs or by their power to help or punish; Nature in her many moods seems the expression of superhuman and often discordant forces, in her regular and cyclic order to be a Mother to be reverenced and honoured; beyond all, primitive man has been touched with a sense of God, of a supreme and ultimate Being, Guardian of Right and Author of existence. Estlin Carpenter quotes this prayer of a Blackfoot Red Indian chief:

‘Great Sun Power! I am praying for my people that they may be happy in the summer, and that they may live through the cold of winter. Many are sick and in want. Pity them and let them survive. Grant that they may live long and have abundance. May we go through these ceremonies correctly as you taught our forefathers to do in the days that are past. If we make mistakes,

pity us! Help us, Mother Earth! for we depend upon your goodness. Let there be rain to water the prairies, that the grass may grow long and the berries be abundant. O Morning Star! when you look down upon us, give us peace and refreshing sleep. Great Spirit! bless our children, friends, and visitors through a happy life. May our trails lie straight and level before us. Let us live to be old. We are all your children, and ask these things with good hearts.'<sup>1</sup>

Though it is pitifully true that for the most part in the world of primitive religion 'darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people', yet primitive religion is sometimes sublime and, perhaps, never is mere foolishness. It is, however, to the more developed forms of thought that we must look for our present purpose.

When Farquhar's *Crown of Hinduism* was published, it was criticized by some on the ground that Christianity is not Hinduism's crown but its negation. The religion of India affords a phantasmagoria of ideas and practices; there is often to be found there a deep spirituality, a passionate devotion, an ethical insight; it embraces notions and aspirations which are akin to that which is most exalted in the other religions of the world; yet as the chill, persistent undertone of the vast orchestra is the conviction of illusion, of the vanity of life, of the meaninglessness of all existence; there is Process but there is no Reason, no Purpose, in the Universe. Men are often better than their moods, and in Hinduism, as sometimes in Christianity, virtue and piety have sprung from inhuman creeds.

<sup>1</sup> Brahmanism and Buddhism make an impression upon

us,' writes Dr. Albert Schweitzer 'because they represent a type of religion that is unified in itself, being the result of consistent reasoning on the world and on life. They present a logical, monistic-pessimistic view of the world and life. But it is a poverty-stricken religion. Its God is mere empty spirituality. Its last word to man is absolute negation of life and of the world. Its ethical content is meagre. It is a mysticism which makes man lose his individual existence in a god that is dead.'<sup>2</sup>

Such a judgement may be quite unfair when applied to any particular Hindu or Buddhist, for few men are spiritually harmonized and consistent, but it would seem a fair judgement upon that type of religion which was described above under the heading of the Impersonal Sacred.

Mysticism in general must also be left upon one side. It is neither necessary nor possible for us to decide what measure of validity or truth may attend the rapt experiences of the mystic, but in so far as his ecstasies are ineffable and private, they cannot become the object of scientific discussion nor form a basis for philosophy.

For the rest, the types of religion described in previous chapters may be grouped very generally as religions of Reason and religions of Revelation, those that arise through man's reflection upon life and nature and those that claim a peculiar revelation from on high. Both types may be ethical, but the former is characterized by philosophical and rational speculation, the latter by the myth. The distinction is valuable, though it is not absolute, for the religions of myth are not wholly irrational, and the religions of Reason, as even Marxist Communism indicates, are not

wholly free from myth. Nor should the distinction between religions of Reason and religions of Revelation be taken to imply that in the former there is no self-disclosure of the Divine.

#### REASON AND REVELATION

The apostle Paul wrote (*Romans* i. 19 f.) about the Gentile world that 'whatever is to be known of God is plain to them; God himself has made it plain—for ever since the world was created, his invisible nature, his everlasting power and divine being, have been quite perceptible in what he has made'. This is partially corroborated by the evidence we have considered. In their conception of *Tao* (the Way) and of *Tien* (Heaven) Chinese thinkers indicate that through the contemplation of Nature man is brought to a sense of an 'eternal power and Godhead' (though impersonally conceived) as manifested through the natural order; the Stoics similarly apprehended a divine Word informing all things, a divinity to which mortal man is in some way akin; Neo-Platonism with its Christian offspring in the teaching of St. Augustine and St. Bonaventura is the noblest illustration of the soul's ascent through sense to spirit, through the transient and partial to the perfect and eternal; astrology, so far as it is touched with religion, Islam as counterpart to the solemnities of the Arabian desert to the soul of man, Mosaism as apprehending God in the earthquake and tempest and volcano and in the silence of the wilderness (*1 Kings* xix. 9 ff.), alike reflect Nature as testifying to a Power beyond itself. Ikhnaton and Spinoza, in very diverse

ways, bear out the claim of the apostle. Whether or not the traditional proofs of the existence of God based upon the logical implications of change (or motion) and on design and purpose in the universe be accepted as cogent for every rational mind, there can be no doubt that dimly or clearly men in every age and religion have been aware of God through the order of Nature. This is an element in the religion of Reason.

The prophet Jeremiah was a lover of nature. To him as to Jesus Christ the events of the natural order were eloquent of divinity: 'yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgement of the Lord' (viii. 7); his picture of chaos come again reaches its climax in the phrase, 'and all the birds of the heavens were fled' (iv. 25); but the religion of the prophets, of Jeremiah himself, of Isaiah, of Zoroaster, or of Socrates, arises from a contemplation of man or of history rather than of the subhuman natural order. If anywhere in man's story we are prepared to believe that God spoke in revelation through the lips of men, we shall see such revelation in the teaching of these prophetic figures, but their religion is still a religion of Reason (though it be also of revelation) in that the divine Word which, it may be thought, they overheard is apprehended in relation to the events and duties of the natural order. As the epoch-making hypothesis which dawns upon the scientist of genius may be called either discovery or revelation, since it neither followed inevitably from

previous thought nor is apart from the whole process of reasoning, so the Word of God which comes to the prophet commands itself to Reason and is in itself a rational pronouncement related to the normal processes of thought. If Judaism and Christianity far outstrip other forms of religion in the seriousness with which they deal with the world as a moral order and with history as the field of the divine activity, these conceptions are present though often overlaid in other types of religion also. 'Pride comes before a fall', we say; the ancient Greeks set forth the same case in a majestic form in their great tragedies; our Aryan forefathers' dim sense of the Sky-god, their father, who was the author and vindicator of Right, finds its echo in the religions of every Continent. If by reason we mean, as do so many to-day, the mere faculty of moving logically from proposition to proposition, this belief in the world as a moral order and in a superintending Providence concerned with the vindication of Truth and Right is not a dictate of the Reason but a leap of faith. If, on the other hand, we understand by the truths of Reason those first principles which seem to occur naturally to the mind of man as he contemplates the world in which he finds himself, the ineradicable convictions not of all men but of most men and especially of those whom we regard as the spiritual leaders of mankind, then the beliefs in the moral order of the world and in Providence belong to the religion of Reason.

This leaves only the Mystery Religions and the religions of *bhakti* or personal devotion, and these

alike rest upon a myth. These myths are derived, as is supposed, not from any contemplation of the ways of nature or of history but from a direct and peculiar self-disclosure of the Divine. The myths declare some divine action, some condescension of Heaven to earth, some manifestation of Deity in the flesh or at least under the forms of sense; the Divine is conceived as personal and as coming into personal contact with the individual worshipper. Here we have religions of Revelation in distinction from Reason, for no meditation upon nature or history led to the necessary or even probable content of these stories. Various as they are, they point, no doubt, to a yearning of the human heart for some answering response from beyond the skies, some condescension of God to the needs and felt impotence of man, some saving grace. With few exceptions these myths of salvation can make no possible claim to historicity; they deal with fancies, not events; they cannot, therefore, in any literal sense be true, and may easily be set aside as mere wishful thinking, self-deception. But the idea that religion is not only an aspiring of the human heart for God but also involves the motion of God to meet with man is not intrinsically irrational, and, as we have argued above, any such condescension of the Divine, if it took place, could only be expressed by human beings in the terms of myth.

Leaving on one side, then, primitive forms of religion as embryonic and the various forms of mysticism as too esoteric and private to be considered by philosophy, we may say, in very general terms, that we find religions of Reason or Provi-

dence which apprehend the world of nature and history as a moral order not independent of a higher and inscrutable and yet beneficent Power, and the religions of Revelation or of Myth which in some form or other offer deliverance from the world and from death through a divine redemptive action. It should always be borne in mind that the clear-cut distinctions which are here necessary for the purposes of scientific discussion are not applicable to individual religious persons. A man may be a mystic at some times, a rationalist at others, and a sacramentalist always. We can, perhaps, find traces of all types of religion, mixed in different proportions, in every religious man. But these distinctions, inapplicable to life, are necessary to philosophic thought. There are many who wholly, or almost wholly, repudiate all mythical conceptions of redemption and allow no revelation beyond that available to man's natural reason. There are others to whom the 'myth' of their adoption is so nearly the whole of their religion that they are almost impervious to the claims of the natural reason or deny that by searching man can in any degree approach to God. Can a religion without a myth or story of a sign from Heaven answering to man's cry and need really satisfy the heart of man or give the basis for a rational interpretation of human life? Men will answer that question differently according to their experience and their insight.

In this connexion Christianity of all empirical religions is of the chief significance, first because upon the basis of classical Humanism it has de-

veloped 'Natural Theology' or the *philosophia perennis*, the religion of Reason, more systematically and critically than any other religion, and second because if the 'mythos' of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rooted in history, is not to be taken seriously, certainly all other myths may be disregarded.

Christian theology moves between two poles, Creation and Redemption, corresponding roughly to the religions of Reason and the religions of Revelation. The doctrine of Creation amounts to this (though often put in cruder forms) that the temporal process has its origin and the universal order its coherence and its purpose, whatever that be, in the Will of God. The beauties, the sublimities, the paroxysms of Nature speak to man mysteriously and perhaps confusedly but inescapably of God. The consciousness of duty within and the observation of the workings of a moral order without indicate a God of righteousness. So far, the Christian religion may be said to be the consummation or 'crown' of a very large part of human religion generally.

The Christian 'mythos' that 'for us men and for our salvation' God became man in Jesus Christ, that he died on the Cross and rose again, is so staggering to the human reason that the difficulties in the way of any alternative explanation of the Gospels and of the rise and spread of the Christian religion will weigh little against what will appear to many as the intrinsic incredibility of the story. A recent writer in *The Times Literary Supplement* after pointing out that the philosopher F. H. Bradley was throughout his life deeply concerned with

religious issues says of his book, *The Presuppositions of Critical History*, that

'its genesis is to be found in the controversies which, provoked by David Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, published in 1835, stirred the whole German intellectual world and affected writers as antipathetic to the religious point of view as Karl Marx. Bradley's essay is concerned with the general problem of the criteria we use for the assessing of historical evidence, but he clearly had his eye all the time on the question of the credibility of the Gospel narratives. He concludes that we cannot accept historical testimony except where we can find some analogy to it in our own experience. Both the general subject and, to some extent, the spirit in which it is discussed are strongly reminiscent of Hume's essay on miracles. So far as the historical basis of Christianity was concerned Bradley had come down on the side of the sceptics.'<sup>3</sup>

Very many, if not most, educated religious men will enthusiastically or sorrowfully agree with Bradley.

But more is at stake for the philosopher of religion than the credibility of the Gospel narratives or of the traditional Christian creed. It is not to be thought that, if the Christian 'mythos' be rejected, the myth of Osiris or of Isis or of Mithras will be accepted in its place; if it be deemed that Christian *bhakti* or passionate personal devotion to Christ betoken mere self-deception, it is not likely that devotion to Krishna or to the Buddha will be treated as experiences of the real. But the Mystery Religious and the *bhakti* sects display some of the most beautiful piety and some of the profoundest insights of religious man. Can we safely assume that these are all based upon illusion? Or, if in part they be based upon illusion, it might be

wiser to ask whether they may not point to some truth beyond themselves. These are the religions of redemption. To some, redemption will appear a phantasy; to others it will seem involved in the very logic of man's earthly plight.

We may revert to Orphism as an illustration. In the sixth century before Christ we find a group of religious people who perceive that man has a double nature: there is something divine in him, something demonic, a fault or flaw within his nature; who teach that man must do what he can by asceticism and moral discipline to cleanse his heart and life, but even so he can but prepare himself for that life beyond life for which he believes he was intended; they receive the old myth of the broken, dying god who rises again; in the sacramental meal they conceive themselves, perhaps even feel themselves, to be made one with this divine being, to be the recipients even now of the pledges of eternal life. No living man supposes that they were actually united with Dionysus-Zagreus; such a being never existed except in man's imagination. But was it a true apprehension that man was made for immortality, and that being a mixed or fallen creature he is in need of a Redeemer? Was their religion pure illusion, or was it pointing towards the truth? In the latter case, the Christians would not be irrational in their claim that in Jesus Christ the ancient myth became reality.

For the religion of Reason is at a crucial point in itself and by itself irrational. It apprehends in some degree the Being of God; it acknowledges

him as almighty; it declares him just and good. But the goodness of God must be an *effective* goodness; it must include an ability as well as a willingness to save. It is irrational to conceive of a God of almighty Power and limited Love. The myths of the dying, rising God and the Christian Gospel are, at different levels, the declaration that the ascent of the soul to God by prayer and desire is met by the answering condescension of God to man's estate. The Christian Gospel far transcends the earlier myths in its assertion of a fathomless and inconceivable love of God to match his majesty and power. According to men's differing insight the Christian Gospel will be regarded as the negation or the fulfilment of the demands of Reason.

The arguments of philosophy are different from the arguments of religion. The picture of religion set forth in these pages and the considerations to which it gives rise may be accepted by the sceptic without any diminution in his personal scepticism; concerning the truth of religion nothing has been proved. The Reformed theologians spoke much of 'the inward testimony of the holy Spirit'; no man will accept the Christian faith or any other, or be a religious man, apart from some inward touch of the heavenly fire at once incommunicable to others and self-evidencing to him.

## NOTES

### CHAPTER I. FUNDAMENTAL MOMENTS IN RELIGION

1. R. R. Marett in Hastings' *E.R.E.*, art. 'Tabu', col. 1.
2. *E.R.E.*, Vol. I, p. 537.
3. *Folklore in the Old Testament*, p. 67.
4. *E.R.E.*, Vol. XI, p. 441.
5. *E.R.E.*, Vol. XI, p. 442.
6. *The Religion of Ancient Rome*, p. 54.
7. Tielc-Söderblom, *Kompendium der Religionsgeschichte*, p. 507.
8. *Studies in the History of Natural Theology*, p. 355.

### CHAPTER II. THE IMPERSONAL SACRED

1. *Hindu Gods and Heroes*, p. 60.
2. *Atharvaveda* I. 10. 11.
3. *Mait. Brah. Up.* VI. 26.
4. *S.B.E.* VIII, p. 347.
5. Quoted Oldenberg, *Upanishads*, p. 15.
6. ib., pp. 28 f.
7. *Brhadaranyaka Up.* I. 3. 28.
8. *The Upanishads and Life*, pp. 20 f.
9. II. 15.
10. *S.B.E.* XV, pp. 112 f.
11. cf. also *Chandogya Up.*, quoted Oldenberg, op. cit., pp. 54 f.
12. Urquhart, op. cit., p. 61.
13. v. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 193: from *Sutta Nipata*.
14. ib., pp. 229-31: from *Samyutta Nikaya* and *Cullavagga*.

15. Warren, *Buddhism in Translation*, pp. 129 ff.
16. ib., p. 16.
17. Oldenberg, op. cit., pp. 304 f.: from *Anguttara Nikaya*.
18. Diogenes fragm. 58: v. Glover, *Conflict of Religions*, p. 220.
19. ib. fragm. 59.
20. Lucretius, *de Rerum Natura* I. 79.
21. Marius the Epicurean, Chapter IX.

### CHAPTER III. THE RELIGION OF NATURE

1. Tao Te Ching I. 25. Hughes, *Chinese Philosophy in Classical Times*, p. 153.
2. Chuang Chou, 3rd cent. B.C. Hughes, p. 179.
3. Commentary on Tao Te Ching. Hughes, pp. 263 f.
4. Chuang Tzu Book. Hughes, p. 201.
5. Kuan Tzu, 39. Hughes, p. 218.
6. Chuang Chou. Hughes, pp. 193 f.
7. Huai Nan Hung Lieh, 2nd cent. B.C. Hughes, p. 287.
8. Tung Chung-shu, 2nd cent. B.C. Hughes, p. 306.
9. Tao Te Ching, perh. 4th cent. B.C. Hughes, p. 148.
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11. Tao Te Ching. Hughes, p. 163.
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13. Chuang Chou. Hughes, p. 192.
14. Hsun Ch'ing, 3rd cent. B.C. Hughes, p. 228.
15. Tzu Ssu, grandson of Confucius. Hughes, p. 39.
16. Analects III. 11.
17. ib. III. 12. 1 and III. 13. 2.
18. ib. IV. 15. 1.
19. ib. VI. 20.
20. ib. VII. 20.
21. ib. VIII. 12.
22. ib. VII. 22.

23. ib. IX. 5. 3.
24. ib. XIV. 37, 2.
25. Li Chi, first cent. B.C. Hughes, pp. 277 f.
26. Li Chi. Hughes, p. 285.
27. Analects IV. 5.
28. Hughes, p. 102.
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30. E. Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics*, p. 56.
31. v. E. Bevan, *Later Greek Religion*, pp. 1-3, 9, 34.
32. *Stoicorum Fragmenta*, Vol. III, fragm. 4, tr. E. Bevan.
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34. ed. A. D. Nock, Chapter IX.
35. ib. Chapters VI, XXI, V.
36. E. Bevan, *Later Greek Religion*, pp. 142 ff.
37. IX. 10. C. Bigg's tr.
38. *Religious Experience*, p. 37.

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2. E.R.E., Vol. XII, art. 'Zoroastrianism'. I have inserted capitals to indicate the technical terms which Carnoy puts in brackets.
3. tr. based on Breasted and Kees.
4. *Das Werden des Gottesglaubens*, pp. 268 ff.
5. VII. 9.
6. *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, E.T. p. 38.
7. ib. pp. 32 ff.
8. ib. pp. 53, 41 ff.
9. ib. pp. 69 f.
10. Ep. 73.
11. Ethics I. 15.
12. Ethics I. 1 and 2; II. 25, 29, 34, 35; de Burgh, *Towards a Religious Philosophy*, pp. 64 f.; H. Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, pp. 3, 9.

13. de Burgh, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
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3. tr. K. J. Saunders.
4. *Lalitavistara*, I.
5. Estlin Carpenter, *Theism in Mediaeval India*, pp. 242 f.
6. VI. 10 ff., 46 f.
7. VI. 29 f.
8. IX. 29, 32 f.
9. XI. 52-5, IV. 6-9.
10. *The Living God*, p. 133.
11. *Primer of Hinduism*, pp. 119 f.
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15. *Symposium*, 209-12, tr. Jowett.

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6. *v. Summa Contra Gentiles*, III. 64 ff.
7. *Analogy*, I. 7, 8 f.

## CHAPTER VII. PROPHETIC RELIGION

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2. Plato, E.T., pp: 53 f.
3. *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, pp. 89 f.

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2. Chuang Chou. Hughes, op. cit., p. 199.
3. A. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, E.T., p. 250.
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16. cited, *A Textbook of Marxist Philosophy*, p. 382.
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2. *Orphée*, p. 11.

3. *Comparative Religion*, pp. 44 f.
4. v. Estlin Carpenter, *Comparative Religion*, pp. 121 f.
5. tr. W. Adlington.

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2. *Christianity and the Religions of the World*, p. 56.
3. *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 Feb., 1946.

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